NIHILISM IN FRENCH LITERATURE, 1880-1900

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by

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- ABSTRACT -

The object of this thesis is to analyse the sources, expression and consequences of the nihilism which appears in the last decades of the nineteenth century in France, as this nihilism is mirrored in the literature of the time.

Chapter I outlines the subject and defines the terms used. Chapters II and III discuss the philosophical evolution which lies behind this nihilism and examine the rôle of scientific developments - in particular the impact of the ideas of Darwin. The decline of belief in the various 'absolutes' of the earlier nineteenth century is stressed - amongst them the belief in 'Nature' and faith in 'Science' - along with the metaphysical 'void' which ensued. Chapter IV examines the vague and ambiguous 'pessimism' of the literary and intellectual youth of France in the 1880's and 1890's and the part played by Schopenhauer in its dissemination - showing that the term 'pessimism' refers to, amongst other things, a view of the 'absurdity' of existence and of the non-justification of all values, and that the vogue of Schopenhauer's philosophy owes much to its apparent confirmation of many of the conclusions of contemporary science. Chapter V analyses the 'idealism' of many of the symbolists and its supposed sources in Schopenhauer. It shows how the former tends to become a nihilistic solipsism, and the ambiguous rôle played by the 'anti-positivist reaction' and 'idealist revival' of these years. Chapter VI explores the political and social factors which underlie and help to explain the vogue of this 'idealism' - the profound sense of alienation or separation from the values of the bourgeois world around them felt by many young writers and intellectuals towards the end of the nineteenth century. It examines the way in which this sense of alienation contributes to the nihilism of these years, and the various ways in which it finds expression.

The following four chapters analyse the elements of nihilism in the work of four writers - Jean Lahor, Jules Laforgue, Maurice Barrès and Alfred Jarry -, all of whom, despite their apparent diversity, reveal the influence of some or all of the factors discussed in the previous five chapters. All four are considered here not from a 'literary' point of view, but as intellectuals reacting to certain ideas and situations. The exact sources and nature of the nihilism of each is explored, and the attempts of Lahor, Laforgue and Barrès to struggle against and to overcome this nihilism - all with only partial success - are stressed, as is also Jarry's resolute acceptance of this nihilism and its systematisation in his 'science' of pataphysics. A penultimate chapter is devoted to an analysis of four works by other authors - Huysmans' A rebours, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's Axël, Bourget's Le Disciple and Claudel's Tête d'Or - all of which reveal various facets of the nihilism of these years.

The concluding chapter outlines the pattern which has emerged from these detailed analyses, and stresses the significance of the nihilism studied as well as certain consequences of the reaction to it - amongst them the rise of a widespread anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism, the growth of various forms of an 'As if' philosophy, and the attempt to create new 'myths' or 'fictions' which will again provide a source of meaning and values for human existence. Finally, it indicates briefly the relationship between the nihilism studied in this thesis and that of the twentieth century.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION.

The view is now generally accepted amongst scholars that the last two decades of the nineteenth century in France - at least as they are mirrored in much of the literature of the time - must be judged an age of distinct intellectual crisis. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of books and essays are published in these years discussing the 'moral crisis', the 'pessimism', the 'decadence', and the like, of France or of its intellectuals. Much of this discussion is placed under the heading of the notoriously vague term 'pessimism', and the name of Schopenhauer is bandied about in salons, in literary journals, and even in the daily press. To take but a few examples: Ferdinand Brunetière discourses at length on 'Le Pessimisme dans le roman', 'Les Causes du pessimisme', and 'La Philosophie de Schopenhauer et les conséquences du pessimisme'(1); J. Bourdeau, translator of the German philosopher, writes in the Revue des Deux Mondes of the increasing vogue of Schopenhauerian pessimism(2); the philosopher J.-M. Guyau goes so far as to ask whether 'pessimism' will become 'the religion of the future' in France(3); whilst in a series of popular lectures at the Sorbonne in 1877-78, his fellow-philosopher Caro makes the claim that: "Jamais on n'a agité avec tant de passion qu'à notre époque la question du mal et celle du prix de la vie"(4). And the spate of literature continues unabated throughout the 1880's and 1890's(5).

A great deal of this, obviously, must be treated with considerable scepticism. Fashion plays its part, while

moralists with an axe to grind have at all times tended to blacken their own era by comparison with past, or future, epochs. Much of the talk of 'decadence', and the confusion surrounding the term, comes fron conscientious and patriotic journalists concerned merely about the international, or at least European, status of France(6). And one must bear in mind that the liking for spiritual melodrama was at least as strong in the nineteenth century as it has proved to be in the twentieth. Every age - unless it be a totally stagnant one - is to some extent an age of intellectual crisis - at least for its 'intellectuals'; and the intellectual life of every era is a confused mingling of conflicting trends, negative and positive, destructive and constructive.

Nevertheless, when the limits of reasonable scepticism have been applied, something remains; and that something is often a good deal more precise and interesting than what is normally understood by the term 'pessimism'. When Caro defines the latter as the final consequence of a philosophical movement which has destroyed all human values, he clearly has something more in mind than a mere gloomy view of life:

> A ce point, le pessimisme nous paraît comme le dernier terme d'un mouvement philosophique qui a tout détruit: la réalité de Dieu, la réalité du devoir, la réalité du moi, la moralité de la science, le progrès, et par là l'effort, le travail, dont cette philosophie proclame l'absolue inutilité. (7)

And the same is true of the author of an article of 1890 on the 'pessimism' of contemporary youth when he writes:

> La jeunesse ne sait à quoi se prendre. Elle a perdu toute foi, tout motif d'activité. Accablée par le lourd héritage que ses aînés lui transmettent, ne voyant derrière elle que ruines et humiliations, devant elle que formidables périls et responsabilités écrasantes, elle renie sa tâche, elle se décourage de la vie avant même d'avoir vécu, et, fermée pour toujours à l'espérance, elle se fait de son désespoir une morne philosophie. (8)

This is an observation with which even such an urbane sceptic as Anatole France appears to concur when he laments: "Nous n'avons plus d'espérances et nous ne croyons plus à ce qui consolait nos pères. [...] Qui nous apportera une foi, une espérance, une charité nouvelles?"(9). And the young Paul Bourget, studying those writers and thinkers who in his view have done most to form the intellectual climate of his own generation, finds in all of them "la même philosophie dégoûtée de l'universel néant"(10).

Others refer explicitly to the 'nihilism' they see around them. Thus the young Barrès, speaking for himself and his contemporaries, exclaims:

> Eh! certes, je le sais bien, sous couleur d'être analystes, nous ne sommes que des nihilistes, des âmes sèches, des cerveaux incapables de sentir efficacement et avec suite, organisés uniquement pour la négation. (11)

At the very beginning of his literary career, in fact, Barrès had planned a series of essays entitled Le Nihilisme contemporain. Barrès, Lahor, Laforgue, and numerous others, all refer specifically at some time to their own 'nihilism' or to themselves as 'nihilists'. Bourget, in his novel Le Disciple (1889), sets out to analyse the 'nihilism' of a particular type of young man whom, he claims, his whole generation had known. And in his Essais de psychologie contemporaine he had spoken of the 'nihilism' of Renan, Baudelaire and Flaubert and its impact on his own generation, describing the present age in the terms:

> Nous vivons dans une époque d'effondrement religieux et métaphysique où toutes les doctrines jonchent le sol. Non seulement nous n'avons plus, comme les gens du XVIIe siècle, un credo général, régulateur de toutes les consciences et principe de tous les actes; mais nous avons perdu aussi cette force de négation qui fut le crédo à rebours du XVIIIe siècle. (12)

Due allowance made for a certain dramatisation, a real problem clearly remains. Yet although numerous aspects of the intellectual life of the period have been discussed - the question of 'decadence'(13), the so-called 'mal de fin de siècle'(14), the influence of Schopenhauer(15) and of German thought generally in France(16), the crisis in historical thought(17), and the 'crisis of humanism' in these years(18) - a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of nihilism during the last decades of the nineteenth century has yet to be made. Such a study would seem, therefore, to be fully justified. It touches upon these diverse questions of decadence, pessimism, and the exact nature of the influence of Schopenhauer, as also upon certain features of the literary 'anarchism' of the 1890's(*), of the roots of a new French Right, and of the 'idealism' of certain symbolists. But it involves an examination of attitudes on a more philosophical plane also; hence the general perspective is larger than that of twenty years of political or literary life, and tends to transcend individual 'movements'. Such a study aims to provide a contribution to the history of the intellectual development of France in the last hundred years, as seen through the literature of an age. It is therefore upon an analysis of the phenomenon of nihilism in French literary thought in the years 1880-1900, of the sources of that nihilism, and of its principal consequences, that this thesis seeks to concentrate.

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(*) Behind the many references in the years following by right-wing writers and thinkers in France (amongst them Charles Maurras, Léon Daudet, Henri Massis, and to some extent Barrès) to the 'anarchy' and 'anarchism' of the 1880's and 1890's, there lies in fact this crisis of values and beliefs which is here called nihilism.

A definition of the term 'nihilism' is an obvious prerequisite. A useful starting-point (leaving aside the many incidental and polemical uses of the term) is provided by the Vocabulaire critique et technique de la philosophie of Lalande(19). Nihilism is defined as follows:

> A. Doctrine d'après laquelle rien n'existe (d'absolu). [...]
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> B. Doctrine d'après laquelle il n'y a point de vérité morale, pas de hiérarchie des valeurs. - Etat de l'esprit auquel manque la représentation de cette hiérarchie, qui se pose la question: "A quoi bon?" et n'y peut répondre. [...]
>
> C. Doctrines d'un parti politique et philosophique russe. [...]

Lalande's third type of nihilism - 'Russian nihilism' - lies outside the bounds of this study, although as the common name implies it bears some relation to the other two(*).

(*) This was originally a movement that arose amongst the young intellectuals of Russia in the 1860's. Its chief spokesman was Pisarev, and its chief organ the review Russkoe Slovo of which he was editor. Finding its starting-point in the materialism of Büchner, Moleschott and Buckle and in the positivism of Comte, the movement represented a crude form of materialistic positivism, violently repudiating all art and exalting the exact sciences as the only 'useful' form of human activity. Moreover, Pisarev and his collegues preached a negation of all authority exercised by State, Church or family, a total refusal of all constraints imposed by society upon the individual, and a total rejection of all tradition, of all past truths and systems of knowledge. They desired to make a completely fresh start in all things, armed only with the tools of 'reason' and the scientific method.

To the extent that the movement preached a thoroughgoing negation of all past and existing truths, values and authority, it is fair to qualify it as nihilism. But in other respects, the term is a complete misnomer. These 'nihilists' in fact believed - passionately and blindly - in their own ideas. More important is the fact that their 'nihilism' constituted a 'tactical manoeuvre', designed ultimately to produce the establishment of a better society. Behind their insistence upon the need to dedicate themselves to a purely negative function - the total destruction of the existing order -, they were all deeply involved with the egalitarian spirit and revolutionary tradition of 1848. They must be seen within the context of the ferment which produced the Russian 'Populist' movement and its idealism: its efforts to create a new Russia.

After 1870, certain nihilists became associated with the Russian terrorist movement - whence the popular identification of the two. But it was mainly the uncomprehending and / Cont.

His first definition of nihilism is subdivided by Foulquié, in his Dictionnaire de la langue philosophique(20), into 'nihilisme critique' and 'nihilisme ontologique'. The former - the idea that we can know nothing of the real, outside world in itself - might perhaps be better called extreme epistemological scepticism. In any case, it interests us less here than the second of Foulquié's subdivisions, 'nihilisme ontologique', which he defines as "[la] doctrine d'après laquelle il n'y a aucune réalité substantielle" - a doctrine which denies, or tends to deny, the reality of the external world.

Such a notion, at first glance, may seem curiously irrelevant to a modern Western context, smacking of the exotic - to be put on a par with, for example, certain Buddhist doctrines of the 'illusoriness' of the world. Foulquié, in fact, claims that the term 'nihilism' used in this sense is rare in French, whilst Lalande claims that it seems never to have existed in French. This may well be true of the works of professional philosophers, but, as we shall see, both the word used in this sense and more especially the concept figure prominently in the work of several of the authors to be studied here. The reasons for this prominence, and the course of the development of this notion of the 'unreality' of the external world or even the explicit denial of its 'reality', form one of the most curious chapters in the intellectual history of the last twenty years of the nineteenth

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/ reactionary Western press which, from the 1870's onwards, was responsible for this confusion as well as for the identification of 'nihilism' with the anarchism of men such as Bakunin and Nechaev. (Cf. Franco VENTURI, Roots of Revolution: a History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth-century Russia, London, 1960, pp. 325-330; and A. COQUART, Dmitri Pisarev (1840-1868) et l'idéologie du nihilisme russe, Paris, Institut d'études slaves de l'Université de Paris, 1946.

century.

Lalande's second definition (B) can also be subdivided into what might be called, on the one hand, 'metaphysical', and on the other, 'moral' nihilism. The two are closely, perhaps inseparably, related, but the distinction is a useful one. Lalande continues his definition with a quotation from Nietzsche - undoubtedly the most profound analyst of the nihilism of his age - which puts the emphasis clearly on the first of these subdivisions:

> Was bedeutet Nihilismus? - Dass die obersten Werte sich entwerten. Es fehlt das Ziel; es fehlt die Antwort auf das "Warum?".

The problem of nihilism is for Nietzsche the central problem of his philosophy, one with which he wrestles all his life; it is the problem which arises from 'the death of God' - understood in the broadest sense possible. Following on from Nietzsche, we can say that metaphysical nihilism is the philosophical situation which results from the collapse, loss or absence of any transcendental or 'given' 'meaning' or 'direction' to existence as a whole, of any such 'justification' for existence; or which results from the loss or absence of all metaphysical concepts or constructions providing that 'meaning' or 'direction' or 'justification' - whether this be God or some other Absolute, some substitute for God such as Reason, or Nature, or History, or the like. Existence has ceased to have any given direction or purpose; to use a common poetic image, man is no longer 'held' by some being or entity greater than himself, is no longer a part of some meaningful process existing outside himself; the 'framework' has vanished; man exists in a 'void'. A comparison with twentieth-century philosophies of 'the absurd' springs immediately to mind, and with good reason: nihilism in this sense is clearly not an

isolated phenomenon, but part of a general development in the intellectual life of the West in the course of the last two centuries or more; and the subject of this thesis overlaps to some extent with what might be called the genesis and the history of the concept of 'the absurd' or 'absurdity'.

A further specification, however, is needed. Metaphysical nihilism is not just the philosophical situation created by the disappearance of those metaphysical notions or constructions which formerly gave 'meaning' to existence. It is also a realisation of the (apparently logical) consequences of this fact. It is an awareness of 'meaninglessness', the consciousness of 'absurdity'. Thus, in a sense, nihilism is a negative phenomenon. The nihilist does not say: "There is...", but: "There is not...". Nihilism begins, at least, as an awareness of an absence, a 'felt' absence, so to speak. It is therefore possible to speak of a 'nihilistic consciousness', of varying degrees of intensity(*).

It is into this framework of 'metaphysical' nihilism that a more specifically 'moral' nihilism fits. If existence as a whole has lost all given or transcendental justification, where is that of particular values? The nihilist is one for whom the values, goals and moral standards which formerly guided life have lost their hold over the mind - without being replaced by some new, 'given' values. Gone is the source

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(*) An example may help to make this clearer. According to Sartre, the professors of 1880, whom he attacks in L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, who tried to establish a lay morality, avoided falling into a nihilistic conclusion by failing or refusing to draw what Sartre considers to be the logical consequence of their abolition of the notion of God. Their 'mauvaise foi' consisted in retaining by and large the previously existing system of values minus its former justifier and source, while failing to (or finding it convenient not to) realise the implications of this abolition. In a situation of nihilism, obviously, something more is present.

of 'meaning' in the universe, the guarantor of the 'value' of existence as a whole; and gone also is the (transcendental) source of all particular values. It is within such a context that definitions of 'moral' nihilism as such must normally be understood - as, for instance, the rejection of all social and moral norms and standards, or as the anarchical exaltation (in the manner of Stirner) of the 'self' as the one and only law-maker.

To sum up, then, we have characterised three basic types of nihilism: 'ontological', 'metaphysical' and 'moral'. It will have been noticed that three key words keep recurring in this discussion, and it is around these three terms that any discussion of nihilism must revolve: these are 'reality', 'meaning' and 'values'. And our three varieties of nihilism can be very roughly characterised as the denial or negation of each of these categories respectively.

Can a common point of focus, or common source, be found for all three types? The answer would seem to be affirmative: initially, the sense of the unreality of the world, of the meaninglessness of existence and of the 'absurdity' of all values all have a common source in 'subjectivity'. All are a consequence of reflection, of a situation in which the mind is thrown back upon itself and begins to question ultimate certainties: how do I <u>know</u> that the world revealed to me by my senses is 'real'? how do I <u>know</u> that there is any purpose or general direction behind the activity of the universe, that there is any justification for human values? These are in fact perennial questions of philosophy. Karsten Harries, pursuing this line of thought in a useful theoretical study of nihilism, finds the starting-point of the road that leads

to nihilism in the very starting-point of modern Western philosophy: in Descartes' cogito. "At the heart of the nihilistic predicament is man's realisation that he is a subject. The world of the nihilist is one which possesses being only for him [...]."(21) Subjectivism may at times tend towards a thoroughgoing solipsism - a falling-back on the 'self' as the sole (remaining) source or centre of value or meaning or reality; or, alternatively, such a solipsism may be a cause as much as a result.

It is important to distinguish clearly a position of nihilism from positions of scepticism, of moral relativism, and of positivism. It is the characteristic of being a 'consciousness of something absent' that distinguishes nihilism from mere scepticism in the metaphysical and moral sphere. The sceptic doubts the existence of any transcendental or given meaning to life and source of values; the nihilist believes or affirms that no such meaning or source exists; the 'mise en question' becomes a statement of absence. In like manner, the moral relativist argues that all values are relative (to what?), without necessarily feeling that this relativity deprives them of all justification; the nihilist goes a step further: if all values are relative, they are therefore without any justification. As for positivism, in the strict sense of the term it and nihilism have no common ground or field of enquiry. In blunt terms, the true positivist stops short of the 'Big Questions' of metaphysics; the nihilist, on the other hand, asks them, but finds no answer - or declares that the answer is a negative one.

It is equally important to distinguish between nihilism

and the dichotomy optimism/pessimism. Nihilism is a philosophical position which is in itself neither optimistic nor pessimistic. An outlook of pessimism, or even of despair, may be (and, admittedly, frequently is) the reaction to a position of nihilism; but this is not a necessary reaction, and the discovery of the 'absurdity' of all things may also produce a sense of joy and exhilaration in a new-found freedom: nothing is 'given', therefore man has a total liberty to create, to invent for himself. Thus the German poet Gottfried Benn, a disciple of Nietzsche, wrote that "Nihilismus ist ein Glücksgefühl". Or as Harries again puts it:

> The nihilist has lost all faith, save that in the intellect, and applying his critical intellect to the inherited values he recognizes them to be hollow. He has looked for supports, for guides, for laws [but] found only disappointment. But the nihilist has also gained something, a new freedom which recognizes no law beyond itself, no ties binding it to a larger order. The nihilist is his own law-giver. (22)

A few small points remain to be mentioned. All the above definitions are of course absolute definitions - and nothing exists in reality in an absolute state. A completely coherent and logically consistent philosophy of nihilism is at the very least extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible, to reconcile with the practical demands of living. Moreover, there is not, properly speaking, in the period with which we are concerned, any such thing as a reasoned or systematically worked out 'philosophy' of nihilism. What we shall be dealing with, therefore, is nihilism as a 'position', a 'standpoint', a view of life and society, and with tendencies rather than with absolute positions; and we shall be more often speaking of 'nihilism' than of 'nihilists' - at least in the sense of individuals upon whom it is possible to pin such a label to

the total exclusion of contradictory ones. Finally, it is clear that the question of nihilism belongs principally to a rather abstract domain - at least in its 'ontological' and 'metaphysical' forms. Hence one need only expect to find nihilists amongst those writers who are to some extent at least philosophically or 'metaphysically' minded - in the French phrase, 'des têtes métaphysiques'. None of these considerations, however, detracts from the extent and the importance of the nihilism found in the intellectual life of France in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Its manifestations are widespread and its consequences of major significance.

It is however impossible, in the space of this study, to trace all these manifestations and to examine in detail all the authors who in any way at all were 'infected' by nihilistic ideas and tendencies. The method chosen, therefore, has been to concentrate for the most part upon those writers in whose work the phenomenon of nihilism is most significant, or whom we can see wrestling most earnestly with the problem. It should be stressed, however (and this explains the apparently motley collection of two poets, one novelist-cum-ideologist, and one writer - Jarry - remembered principally, if inadequately, as a perpetrator of grotesque farces), that these men are considered here not as 'littérateurs' but as intellectuals, men reacting in a certain way to certain ideas. The thesis concludes with a number of studies of individual works of literature relevant to the question of nihilism in these years. The study which follows will, it is hoped, throw some light both on the philosophical universe of those writers studied, and on that of the age in which they lived.

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(2) 'Le Bonheur dans le pessimisme. Schopenhauer d'après sa correspondance', Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 Aug., 1884.

(3) 'Le Pessimisme sera-t-il la religion de l'avenir?', Revue Bleue, tome II, 1886, pp. 308-313.

(4) Published in R.D.M., 15 Nov., 1877; 1 Dec.,1877; 15 May, 1878. Published in volume form as Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle. Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Paris, Hachette, 1878. The passage quoted is from the 'Avant-propos' to the latter, pp. i-iii.

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Léon CROUSLÉ, Du Pessimisme dans la poésie, Paris, 1894.
Maurice PUJO, La Crise morale, Paris, 1898.

(6) Cf. K. W. SWART, The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-century France, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1964.

(7) Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle, 1878, p. 292.

(8) G. PELLISSIER, 'Le Pessimisme dans la littérature contemporaine', in Essais de litt. contemporaine, Paris, 1893, p.10.

(9) 'Pourquoi sommes-nous tristes?', in La Vie littéraire, III, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, s.d., pp. 8-9.

(10) Essais de psychologie contemporaine, Paris, Lemerre, 1883, p. 322.

(11) Introduction to Trois Stations de psychothérapie, Paris, 1891, p. xvi.

(12) Essais de psychologie contemporaine, 1883, p. 198. (In the revised (Plon) edition of 1899, "toutes les doctrines" is modified to "d'innombrables doctrines" - a modification perhaps explained by Bourget's new-found political and religious convictions.)

(13) Cf. K.W. SWART, The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-century France, and A. E. CARTER, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900, University of Toronto Press, 1958.

(14) Cf. Guy MICHAUD, Message poétique du symbolisme, tome I, Paris, Nizet, 1947; Charles DEDEYAN, Le Nouveau Mal du siècle de Baudelaire à nos jours, tome I: 1840-1889, Paris, Société d'édition de l'enseignement supérieur, 1968; Keith MILLWARD, L'Oeuvre de Pierre Loti et l'esprit "Fin de siècle", Paris, Nizet, 1955.

(15) Cf. A. BAILLOT, L'Influence de la philosophie de Schopenhauer en France (1860-1900), Paris, Vrin, 1927.

(16) Cf. Claude DIGEON, La Crise allemande de la pensée française (1870-1914), Paris, P.U.F., 1959.

(17) Cf. Marie-Claire BANCQUART, Les Ecrivains et l'Histoire, Paris, Nizet, 1966.

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(19) André LALANDE, Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie, Paris, P.U.F., 9e éd., 1962.

(20) Paul FOULQUIÉ, Dictionnaire de la langue philosophique, Paris, P.U.F., 1962.

(21) Karsten HARRIES, In a Strange Land: an Exploration of Nihilism, Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1961, p. 36.

(22) ibid., p. 2.

Chapter II: THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND.

The phenomenon of nihilism, obviously, does not suddenly appear upon the European intellectual scene around 1880. It is a culmination of a long philosophical development, and must be seen in its historical context. To this end, it is desirable to outline briefly the philosophical background to the phenomenon - or more specifically, since nihilism has been defined as the absence of certain positive concepts, to trace the decline of these concepts from the beginning of the nineteenth century to its end. When and how does what we have called the nihilistic consciousness appear in European intellectual life?

We can best begin by considering the concept of 'the meaning of existence'. Such a concept seems comprehensible only in terms of its near-synonyms 'purpose' and 'direction', and of the notion of justification. In a fully 'meaningful' universe, a direction or pattern is imposed upon the course of events by some power or force external to it and/or more than the sum of its parts. Within this universal pattern, human history is moving in a given direction, towards a given end; and within the broader pattern of history nations, races and individuals in turn all have a rôle to play, acting in accordance with certain given principles or laws: in this is to be found the 'justification' of human existence, and of the existence of each individual - a concept inseparable from the idea of a place in a whole, of having a rôle to play. Such a meaningful universe is, broadly speaking, provided by the conceptions of Christianity (or by the Judaeo-Christian concept of history): God has a plan for the world as a whole,

God is the source and justifier of all values(1). That the appearance of nihilism is causally related to the decline of the hold which Christian doctrines exercised over the European mind is evident; but the relationship is not a direct one. Rather, certain of the fundamental concepts of Christianity passed over into various secular systems of thought in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; thus the appearance of nihilism is directly related to the decline, in turn, of the various 'Absolutes' or 'substitute-Gods' of these two centuries.

The manner in which, amongst the deists of the eighteenth century, the concept of Nature had usurped the rôle of God needs no emphasis. Nature was the supreme Order in the Universe, controlling through immanent laws the course of events; it was also, through the injunction to "follow Nature", the orderer (along with the closely related, if equally vague, concept of Reason) of men's lives and of society - whence the development of a 'natural' morality, a 'natural' religion, and so on. But it is in the greatest idealist philosophical systems of the beginning of the nineteenth century, in which the belief of the eighteenth century in Reason, in Nature, and its incipient concept of progress, find a culmination, that the evolution of such Absolutes reaches a peak. Of these idealist systems, the most powerful and most influential is undoubtedly that of Hegel, which takes the eighteenth-century concept of 'progress' - hitherto seen as merely a phenomenon of human history - and inserts it into a cosmic process: the whole universe follows an <u>a priori</u> logical development, its history is the unfolding (<u>Entwicklung</u>) of a gigantic plan, in which every detail conforms

to a specific purpose. The philosophy of Hegel represents the most formidable effort ever to 'explain' the universe, to see it as a rational, unified, forward-moving process - a conception which lies at the opposite pole to a vision of its 'absurdity'.(2)

The influence of such idealist conceptions upon European thought in the early nineteenth century is enormous. In France, the chief disseminator of German thought was the 'eclectic' philosopher Victor Cousin, whose impact upon the outlook of the Romantic generation - and in particular upon its greatest historians, Michelet and Quinet, was profound(3). Yet whatever the sources of such conceptions, the fact remains that the early nineteenth century as a whole is an age of vast metaphysical constructions, of systems purporting to 'explain' the universe and the course of history, of unbounded belief in the 'meaningfulness' of existence. In the words of Bréhier, the first half of the nineteenth century sees "une extraordinaire floraison de doctrines amples et constructives, qui prétendent révéler le secret de la nature et de l'histoire et faire connaître à l'homme la loi de sa destinée, individuelle et sociale"(4).

The years following the mid-century - the age, as it is commonly known, of 'positivism' - form a period of transition between the belief in a fully 'meaningful' universe and the concept of an 'absurd' world. This age sees a further rapid weakening of the hold of Christianity, and, more significantly, a marked weakening of the metaphysical systems and beliefs of the first half of the century. This is partly due to the growth, under the influence of the growing prestige and claims of the natural sciences, of a more 'hard-headed', analytical

approach to such matters; the 'positivist' approach, properly speaking, predisposes to scepticism concerning all a priori metaphysical conceptions; the only certain knowledge man can have is of phenomena and their relationships, never of 'first' or 'final' causes(*). But scepticism is not yet nihilism, and moreover the strict positivists are few even in these years; the voices of explicitly anti-positivist philosophers (Christians, neo-criticists, eclectics, spiritualists) remain audible; whilst even in many of those thinkers commonly regarded as 'positivists' the 'metaphysical habit' persists and certain key concepts from the previous era are not entirely abandoned(5). Instructive in this regard are the three most powerful and most celebrated philosophers of 'positivism', Comte, Taine and Renan.

Comte departs from his own initial definition of the positivist standpoint in favour of a re-establishment of the a priori. And while he does not go so far as to reintroduce any notion of a cosmic 'planner', he does see a 'design' and a 'purpose' in the pattern of history; a law of progress (although Comte prefers the term 'development', with its Hegelian overtones, to the term 'progress') guides the course of events towards a given end; historical development is thus a rational and necessary process. It is also a desirable one: Comte shares the confidence of the eighteenth century in the

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(*) Cf. Comte's celebrated definition: "Dans l'état positif, l'esprit humain, reconnaissant l'impossibilité d'obtenir des notions absolues, renonce à chercher l'origine et la destination de l'univers et à connaître les causes intimes des phénomènes, pour s'attacher uniquement à découvrir, par l'usage bien combiné du raisonnement et de l'observation, leurs lois effectives, c'est-à-dire leurs relations invariables de succession et de similitude." (Cours de philosophie positive, tome I, 1864, pp. 9-10.)

goodness of Nature; the direction of this evolution is good, and each stage is the best possible at that time - from which point Comte jumps to the injunction that, given this course of historical development, men must conform to its laws. Whatever is, is right.(*) Finally, Comte, in a manner similar to Hegel, presents his own system - with its prescriptions concerning religion, ethics, politics and philosophy - as the culmination of this historical process, having an absolute justification and validity(6).

The work of Taine, far from eschewing metaphysics, is dominated by a dream of the attainment of a total view of man and the universe, a total 'explanation' of the world as a rational, necessary and determined unity - a dream which derives from the pantheistic vision of his youthful master Spinoza, and is confirmed by a study of Hegel(7). Taine claims to offer no new metaphysical system (any more than a new religion or ethics); but on the other hand, he does claim to offer a method by which a new, 'scientific' metaphysics - and with it a new aesthetics, ethics, political science and religion - may be elaborated. In place of an existing 'explanation' of the world, hope is placed in 'science' for the discovery of that explanation in the future; the extent of Taine's hopes can be measured from his celebrated 'profession of faith':

> Dans cet emploi de la science et dans cette conception des choses il y a un art, une morale, une politique, une religion nouvelle, et c'est notre affaire aujourd'hui

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(*) Comte refers, for example, to "l'évolution fondamentale de l'humanité[...], qui doit devenir ultérieurement la principale base rationnelle de la morale positive" (Cours de philosophie positive, IV, p. 294. My italics). The jump is, of course, quite unjustified logically, though this in no way prevents Comte from firmly believing in his new ethics.

de les chercher.(8)

If the thought of Taine offers a clear illustration of the attempt, common to his age, to reconcile the claims of science and those of metaphysics, the work of Renan illustrates superbly the conflict between the claims of contemporary science and the beliefs of an inherited religion - a conflict which for men of a later generation such as Barrès or Lafforgue has already been resolved - in the defeat of the latter. Throughout most of his life, Renan is concerned with an attempt to build a new, 'scientific' religion, which will incorporate certain of the fundamental concepts of Christianity and ultimately replace the latter: this is 'la religion de la science'. The belief in a hidden 'meaning' in the universe, in the 'destiny' of man, remains; but now hope for the revelation of these is vested in science: "La science n'a réellement qu'un seul objet digne d'elle: c'est de résoudre l'énigme des choses, c'est de dire à l'homme le mot de l'univers et de sa propre destinée."(9) It alone, too, can provide man with a new moral law to replace that of Christianity, can reveal "le divin idéal qui seul donne du prix à l'existence humaine"(10).

But Renan does not just place his hopes in science, he goes on to elaborate a metaphysical system the main inspiration of which is Hegel. There is an Absolute (which Renan rebaptizes 'God' or 'the Ideal') working itself out in the course of the evolution of the universe. There is a cosmic design, and mankind is part of it. History, far from being a meaningless succession of events, is "une tendance spontanée vers un but idéal"; "le monde a un but et travaille à une oeuvre mystérieuse"; "une volonté supérieure se sert de nous, et fait quelque chose

par l'humanité"(11). From this view of cosmic evolution, moreover, Renan deduces a new ethics, finding a new sanction to replace the supernatural sanction of Christianity in the concept of 'nature'; like Comte, he shares the fundamental eighteenth-century confidence in nature's goodness, and like Comte he believes that the goal of nature's progress - that is, of universal evolution - is good. Man must therefore willingly collaborate in this process of evolution, now reinterpreted (along Hegelian lines) as the bringing into being (or into consciousness) of 'God'. Ultimately Renan reintroduces in a newly interpreted form many - even the majority - of those concepts and practices of Catholic Christianity which he himself had specifically rejected.(12)

Much of this is of course a gross simplification of Renan's views, and overlooks the many vicissitudes (as well as inherent contradictions) of his thought. The last period of his life, moreover, sees a withering away and questioning of many of his former beliefs. But in the years before 1870, the belief in the 'meaningfulness' of the universe, and of human existence within it, remains firmly implanted in Renan's mind. The lack of originality of many of his metaphysical and ethical notions merely underlines their significance in the present context. The 'positivist' age as a whole, whilst sceptical towards or openly rejecting the vast metaphysical systems of the earlier nineteenth century, still tends to retain certain key concepts of those systems - amongst them the belief in the 'meaningfulness' of existence and the belief in the 'goodness' and rationality of Nature or universal evolution.

This situation can be clearly seen in a lengthy and

influential article of 1861 by Edmond Scherer, one of the more perceptive critics and historians of ideas of his time, on Hegel and the Hegelian philosophy(13). Scherer, at the very same time as he describes the progressive collapse of the Hegelian system (now merely a "formule stérile" and "ritournelle dialectique") and, more important, pathetically deplores one of the major consequences of this in his own day, the advent of philosophical and ethical relativism, the disappearance of all 'absolutes' ("l'absolu est mort dans les âmes, et qui le ressuscitera?"(14)), confidently proclaims his faith and that of his generation in the 'rationality' of the universe, the coherence of the whole governed by 'immanent laws'. Hegel had recognized that "si l'univers est intelligible, c'est qu'il est intelligent [...]. La chose n'est que le corps de l'idée, le phénomène n'est que l'expression de la loi", summing up this recognition in the axiom that "tout ce qui est réel est par là même rationnel"; and Scherer continues:

> Il [Hegel] nous a enseigné le respect et l'intelligence des faits. Nous avons appris de lui à reconnaître l'autorité de la réalité. Nous savons aujourd'hui y démêler une idée supérieure, et alors même que nous n'apercevons pas cette idée, nous avons l'assurance qu'elle finira par se manifester. Nouveauté immense! ce qui est a pour nous le droit d'être. Le mot de hasard n'a plus de sens à nos yeux. Nous croyons à la raison universelle et souveraine. Nous y croyons pour l'histoire comme pour la nature.[...] Nous nous livrons [in practising the methods of modern science] à l'évolution des lois immanentes de l'univers, afin de les suivre et de les saisir.[...] Aux yeux du savant moderne, tout est vrai, tout est bien à sa place. La place de chaque chose constitue sa vérité.(15)

Obviously one must not minimize the difference between such a conception and the total conception of Hegel, nor the differences (beginning on a linguistic plane) from conceptions earlier in the century (there is nothing, for example, in all this of the 'destiny' of man); and nor should one overlook Scherer's

emphasis on the impact of the relativism which he so deplores. Yet his view is significant in its combination of the belief that the Hegelian system is 'dead' with an almost lyrical celebration of one of the most basic concepts of that system - the belief in the essential rightness and rationality of the natural order, the belief that all existence is, so to speak, 'justified'. Hegel may be dead, but his ghost lingers on.

Equally significant - and typical - is Scherer's confident belief that whatever is not yet known by science will be known. A belief in both the progress of science (or knowledge), and in a broader 'progress', underlies the thought of Scherer, and is equally fundamental to almost all thinkers of his time. It is of particular importance in the ethical thought of 'positivists' like Littré, Comte and Renan, and for their whole generation of 'agnostic humanists' for whom, as Charlton puts it, "the progress of humanity is the source of moral conviction"(16). This belief in progress, and what we may call the broader historical optimism of the age, is of such importance that it warrants more detailed discussion.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, according to a little book entitled De l'idée de progrès published in 1851 by one M. A. Javary, the belief in progress was the most widespread and characteristic concept of the age(17). This is not to say that there was agreement as to how progress came about - the debate continued as to whether it was a fatal, automatic process, determined by immutable historical laws, or a process determined only by conscious human effort -, nor that conceptions of what progress involved were uniform: for some it meant increasingly greater liberty, for others greater equality, for others again greater happiness, or moral development, or intellectual advance, or even the progressively greater

organisation of society(18). But, with the exception of a handful of Catholic reactionaries such as Veuillot, the generalisation holds good that, strengthened by the evidence of accelerating material advances and by the vast strides made by the natural sciences, a belief in the progress of mankind is common to all the major thinkers of this age, and that this belief tends, at least implicitly, to embrace a concept of progress as automatic and inevitable. Hugo's Plein Ciel (in La Légende des siècles, 1859), for all its bombast, goes a long way towards expressing this aspect of the common faith of his contemporaries.

It is in this age, moreover, that the idea of progress is further strengthened by the fusion of two previously distinct concepts. In France, Comte had already given a new impetus to the idea. But Comte had been concerned only with progress as a phenomenon of human history. The German idealist school, on the other hand, and most notably Hegel, had placed the process of human history within a broader, 'cosmic', metaphysical development. Moreover, where Comte had looked forward to the future, writing as if he himself were on the threshold of and ushering in history's most significant period yet, Hegel had been concerned solely with interpreting the past, regarding history as having reached an end and a culmination in his own age and his own philosophy(19). In the minds of certain thinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the eighteenth-century and Comtian concept of progress merges with the metaphysical vision of Hegel, under the impact above all of the theories of Darwin, whose influence upon this generation and the next is incalculable. This fusion is achieved in France most notably by Renan - who takes the theories of

Darwin and the forward-looking Comtian view of progress and places them both in the broader context of a 'cosmic' evolution, equated, in Hegelian manner, with the progressive realisation of the Absolute -, and in England by Herbert Spencer, whose immediate influence in France appears to have been in some respects greater than that of Darwin himself. To the majority of his contemporaries, in fact, Darwin's theses appeared to confirm and strengthen existing theories of progress, and the concept of evolution was expanded by them from the purely biological to embrace also the historical and even the ethical sphere(20). Darwin himself saw his evolutionary theories as a source of trumpeting optimism, and in the hands of Spencer they became the basis of almost a new gospel of faith in unlimited progress. At the same time, moreover, whilst members of the German materialist school triumphantly seized upon Darwin's ideas as proof of the absence of any conscious design in creation, these same theories seemed to Spencer and many others to confirm the concept of design, and they incorporated the idea of organic evolution into a vision, similar to that of Renan, of a vast cosmic design: the progress of humanity, like the progress of organic evolution, is a necessary fact, and both are part of a general cosmic movement, governed by the same universal principles or laws; nothing in the universe is fortuitous, everything is part of the one vast, cosmic plan.(*)

(*) Cf. the following from Spencer: "In the moral as in the material world accumulated evidence is gradually generating the conviction that events are not at bottom fortuitous, but that they are wrought out in a certain inevitable way by unchanging forces." "After patient study, this chaos of phenomena into the midst of which he [man] was born has begun to generalise itself to him. [Instead of confusion, man begins to discern] the dim outlines of a gigantic plan. No accidents, no chance, but everywhere order and completeness." (Cited by J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress, London, 1920, pp. 339-40.)

Whilst the unbridled optimism and conviction of cosmic 'design' of men like Spencer doubtless represent an extreme case, elements of this belief continue to pervade the thinking of most men in this age. Moreover, the vast majority of thinkers of almost all political persuasions in these years and beyond do hold to a general belief in the progress of humanity(21) - a source for them both of moral conviction and of a profound historical optimism. Not only do men like Comte and Renan base their ethical convictions on both a belief in progress as such and in the fundamental goodness of this progress (or evolution, or historical development(*)), but they are also swept along, like the naturalist philosophers of the eighteenth century, by their historical optimism, feeling no need to call into question the basic premises of their existence, and confident that any questions not yet answered will be answered in the not-too-distant future. As a generalised 'état d'esprit', this profound historical optimism of the generation of Taine, Renan and Spencer is not only far removed from any form of nihilism, but acts as a bulwark against the development of nihilism.

No less important is the hope placed by this generation, and to a considerable extent the next also, in 'science'.

(*) This can be clearly seen even in the case of a man such as Emile Littré, one of the most rigorously 'positivist' thinkers (in the strict sense) of his generation. Discerning in the history of mankind a process involving "la décroissance du surnaturel et la croissance du naturel, la décroissance des notions subjectives et la croissance des notions objectives, la décroissance du droit divin et la croissance du droit populaire, la décroissance de la guerre et la croissance de l'industrie", and so on, Littré concludes from this: "Là est la source de convictions profondes, obligatoires pour la conscience." (Cited by D.G. Charlton, Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire (1852-1870), O.U.P., 1959, p. 69. My italics.)

Through the progress of knowledge, 'science', it is believed, will and must reveal the 'secret' of the universe and become the governor of men's lives. Something of the beliefs concerning science of men like Taine, Comte and Renan has already been seen; the latter is in fact the most eloquent, and perhaps the most typical, exponent of that religion of science or 'scientism' held by so many of his contemporaries. Passages abound in the youthful L'Avenir de la Science (written in 1848-49, though not published until 1890), for example, voicing Renan's faith:

> La science, en effet, ne valant qu'en tant qu'elle peut remplacer la religion [...].(22)
>
> La science ne vaut qu'autant qu'elle peut rechercher ce que la révélation prétend enseigner.(23)
>
> Pour moi, je ne connais qu'un seul résultat à la science, c'est de résoudre l'énigme, c'est de dire définitivement à l'homme le mot des choses, c'est de l'expliquer à lui-même [...].(24)
>
> Seule la science donnera à l'humanité ce sans quoi elle ne peut vivre: un symbole et une loi.(25)
>
> Organiser scientifiquement l'humanité, tel est donc le dernier mot de la science moderne, telle est son audacieuse mais légitime prétention.(26)

Renan's hopes are echoed by his friend Marcellin Berthelot in the preface to his L'Origine de l'Alchimie (1885): "Le monde est aujourd'hui sans mystère. La conception rationelle prétend tout éclairer, tout comprendre, donner une explication scientifique de toutes choses [...]."(27) Ten years later Berthelot can still write in the Revue de Paris that "le triomphe universel de la science arrivera à assurer aux hommes le maximum possible de bonheur et de moralité"(28). Whilst even such a cautious and loyal positivist (in the strict sense) as Claude Bernard looks to science for the development of a new ethics which will "dominer le bien et le mal, faire naître

l'un et le développer, lutter avec l'autre pour l'extirper et le détruire"(29).

The most striking of the claims made for science is that it can reveal to man the secret of his 'destiny' and provide an 'explanation' of the world. In this regard, scientism appears as an attempt to provide a Hegelian-type metaphysics starting from a basis of scientific knowledge instead of one of a priori speculation. Charlton, in fact, sees scientism as arising from a fusion of Hegel and true positivism(*). It is striking to find, moreover, that Hegel, from being presented in the early part of the century as an idealist, comes to appear to many in the years after 1850 as an ally of the positivists and the materialists(30).

But the extravagant hopes placed in science are not restricted to those thinkers intoxicated with Hegel, and nor are they restricted to philosophers or men of science. The prestige of science amongst men of letters in these years, and the influence of scientific thinking upon literary form and content amongst Parnassians and Naturalists, needs no emphasis(31). But even more significant than the methodology of naturalist literature - the pretensions of Zola and others to be conducting a 'scientific investigation' into the nature of man and society - is the faith of a man like Zola, a faith which finds perhaps its most exalted expression in the credo of his Dr Pascal:

(*) Cf. his comments on Taine and Renan: "He [Taine] illustrates with especial clarity one of the most significant distortions of positivism in the mid-nineteenth century, a distortion arising from the intermingling of German idealism and Anglo-French positivism. The addition of Hegel and positivism produces scientism: this is the equation demonstrated in the philosophies of Taine and Renan alike."(Positivist Thought in France under the Second Empire, p. 154.)

> Je crois que l'avenir de l'humanité est dans le progrès de la raison par la science. Je crois que la poursuite de la vérité par la science est l'idéal divin que l'homme doit se proposer. Je crois que tout est illusion et vanité, en dehors du trésor des vérités lentement acquises et qui ne perdront jamais plus. Je crois que la somme de ces vérités, augmentant toujours, finira par donner à l'homme un pouvoir incalculable et la sérénité, sinon le bonheur [...].(32)

This faith in the twin idols of progress and science continues to pervade the thinking of most Frenchmen throughout the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, even in the years before 1870 cracks have begun to appear in the façade, which widen as the century draws to an end. Against the belief of his contemporaries in a 'meaningful' universe, the poet-scientist Jean Lahor (Henri Cazalis) proclaims that "tout marche au hasard", "au commencement était la démence", the universe is simply a "tourbillon fou", "sans but"(33). For the young Laforgue, the universe offers nothing but the spectacle of an "affolement universel", a "néant sans coeur", the earth is no more than "un atome où se joue une farce éphémère"(34). Whilst even the mature Barrès can write: "La vie n'a pas de sens. Je crois même que chaque jour elle devient plus absurde.[...] De quelque point qu'on les considère, l'univers et notre existence sont des tumultes insensés."(35)

At the same time, in opposition to the historical optimism of the age there begins to grow a sense of the impending doom of civilisation. The striking technical and material advances which marked the triumph of applied science and which inspired most men with a growing optimism and self-confidence, produced in a minority an equally deepening pessimism. Poets such as Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle(36) present visions of the impending death of the planet, whilst

Flaubert's final, uncompleted novel, Bouvard et Pécuchet, offers a nihilistic condemnation of the whole of contemporary civilisation and its values(*). By the mid-1880's in France, with the flourishing of the self-styled 'decadent' movement, the idea of the decadence and impending doom of Western civilisation - of a civilisation whose spiritual basis has been undermined - has become commonplace; whilst in Germany the theme runs through the work of Nietzsche to find a culmination in Spengler's profoundly pessimistic Untergang des Abendlandes, published on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War.

What has happened to produce this disillusionment, and more, in what is admittedly a minority of thinkers, but (as we shall see) a steadily growing minority? The causes of this new mood are many and varied, but chief amongst them must be counted the shaking of the previous generation's faith in

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(*) Cf. the following passage from Baudelaire's Fusées (1855-62): "Le monde va finir. La seule raison pour laquelle il pourrait durer, c'est qu'il existe. Que cette raison est faible, comparée à toutes celles qui annoncent le contraire, particulièrement à celle-ci: qu'est-ce que le monde a désormais à faire sous le ciel?" (Journaux intimes, ed. Crépet & Blin, Paris, Corti, 1949, p. 34).

To some extent Baudelaire represents a special case, his denunciation of contemporary civilisation being based on a position of political reaction, harking back to de Maistre, and on the affirmation of a somewhat inconsistent but tenacious 'spiritualism'. Similar comments apply, later in the century, to the condemnations of Western civilisation made by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy (albeit for radically differing reasons!). There have always been explicitly Christian thinkers and political arch-reactionaries who have condemned outright the material advance or political development of modern Western society. We are more concerned here with the case of those non-Christian thinkers who, in their condemnation, have no alternative ethical or metaphysical position upon which to fall back.

'progress', a crisis in ethical thought based on 'nature', and, to some extent encompassing both of these factors, a growing crisis of faith in that 'religion of science' or 'scientism' which for many men had taken the place of traditional Christianity. We must therefore glance briefly at the reasons behind this 'crisis of confidence' in science, and at the metaphysical and ethical <u>débâcle</u> which for many men resulted from it.

Chapter II: REFERENCES.

(1) Cf. inter alia J. BAILLIE, The Belief in Progress, O.U.P., 1950; Karl LÖWITH, Meaning in History, Chicago, 1949.

(2) Cf. R. G. COLLINGWOOD, The Idea of History, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962; J. B. BURY, The Idea of Progress, London, 1920; LÖWITH, op. cit.; M. GINSBERG, The Idea of Progress: a Revaluation, London, 1953; M.-C. BANCQUART, Les Ecrivains et l'Histoire, Paris, Nizet, 1966.

(3) Cf. D.G.CHARLTON, 'Victor Cousin and the French Romantics', French Studies, vol. 17, 1963, pp. 311-323 ; J.-M. CARRÉ, Les Ecrivains français et le mirage allemand (1800-1914), Paris, 1947.

(4) Emile BRÉHIER, Histoire de la philosophie [redacted], tome 2, fascicule III, Le XIXe siècle: Période des systèmes, Paris, Alcan, 1940, p. 573.

(5) Cf. D. G. CHARLTON, Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire (1852-1870), O.U.P., 1959, pp. 5-23; E. BRÉHIER, Histoire de la philosophie [redacted], tome 2, fasc. IV, Le XIXe siècle: après 1850, Paris, P.U.F., 1944.

(6) Cf. the chapter on Comte in Charlton, Positivist Thought in France..., pp. 24-50; BAILLIE, The Belief in Progress; and BURY, The Idea of Progress.

(7) CHARLTON, Positivist Thought in France..., pp. 132-4.

(8) La Littérature anglaise, IV. Cit. CHARLTON, op. cit., p. 153. Cf. also ibid., pp. 141-147.

(9) 'La Métaphysique et son avenir'(1860), in Dialogues et fragments philosophiques, 1876. Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, I, p. 697.

(10) Cf. CHARLTON, op. cit., p. 107.

(11) Cf. the section 'Certitudes' in Dialogues philosophiques (1871). Oeuvres complètes, I, pp. 570, 582-3, et al.

(12) Cf. inter alia the chapter on Renan in CHARLTON, op. cit., pp. 86-126.

(13) 'Hegel et l'hégélianisme', Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 Feb. 1861, pp. 812-856.

(14) ibid., pp. 852, 855.

(15) ibid., pp. 853-4. My italics.

(16) Positivist Thought in France..., p. 69.

(17) Cf. BURY, The Idea of Progress.

(18) Cf. ibid.

(19) Cf. ibid.; CHARLTON, op. cit., pp. 108-111; BAILLIE, The Belief in Progress.

(20) Cf. BURY, op. cit., pp. 139, 142.

(21) Cf. M.-C. BANCQUART, Les Ecrivains et l'Histoire, p. 13.

(22) L'Avenir de la Science (1890), in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Henriette Psichari, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, III, p.746.

(23) ibid., p. 759.

(24) ibid., p. 746.

(25) ibid.

(26) ibid., p. 757.

(27) Cited by C. A. FUSIL, La Poésie scientifique de 1750 à nos jours, Paris, 1918, p. 134.

(28) 'Science et morale', Revue de Paris, 1 Feb. 1895. Cited by R. FATH, De l'influence de la science sur la littérature française dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle, Lausanne, 1901, p. 13.

(29) Cited by R. FATH, op. cit., p. 13.

(30) Cf. CHARLTON, Positivist Thought in France..., pp. 154-5.

(31) Amongst other discussions, cf. FATH, op. cit., and FUSIL, op. cit.

(32) Le Docteur Pascal, Paris, Charpentier-Fasquelle, 1954, p. 47.

(33) Jean LAHOR (pseud. of Henri CAZALIS), La Gloire du Néant, Paris, 1896, p. 153; Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste et le pessimisme héroïque, Paris, 1906, 'Avant-propos'; 'Notes et fragments biographiques', in Oeuvres choisies, Paris, 1909, p. xxxiv.

(34) In 'Crépuscule de dimanche d'été', 'Soir de carnaval', 'Farce éphémère', from an early unpublished collection, Le Sanglot de la Terre. Oeuvres complètes, Mercure de France, I, pp. 41, 14, 19.

(35) Les Amitiés françaises, Paris, 1917 ed., p. 253.

(36) Cf. for example 'Solvet seclum', in Poèmes barbares, 1862.

Chapter III: THE CRISIS OF SCIENTISM.

In a much-noted article in the Revue des Deux Mondes of 1896, Ferdinand Brunetière joined the chorus of those proclaiming 'la banqueroute' and 'la faillite de la science':

> s'il est vrai que depuis cent ans la science ait prétendu remplacer "la religion", la science, pour le moment et pour longtemps encore, a perdu la partie. Incapable de nous fournir un commencement de réponse aux seules questions qui nous intéressent, ni la science en général, ni les sciences particulières, - physiques ou naturelles, philologiques ou historiques, - ne peuvent plus revendiquer [...] le gouvernement de la vie présente.(1)

The cry was one much-echoed in these years. The closing decades of the nineteenth century are in fact a period of re-assessment of the nature and value of scientific knowledge and a time of increasingly frequent attacks upon what is commonly, if incorrectly, called 'positivism'. Ravaisson(2) in the 1860's and Lachelier(3) are the two major figures in the opening round of this attack, of which a major landmark is Boutroux's De la contingence des lois de la nature of 1874 and the culminating point the work of Bergson(4) and, in the early years of the twentieth century, of Henri Poincaré(5). This 'anti-positivist' reaction contains both a positive and a negative side: a criticism of the claims of the natural sciences, and an affirmation of the autonomy of the mind or spirit of man and of the reality of his 'spiritual' life. Ravaisson had tried to show that the methods of science cannot account for the whole of reality, whilst Lachelier had reaffirmed, in the face of scientific determinism, the freedom of the human mind. Boutroux and his follows had attempted to vindicate the reality of the spiritual life of man by throwing doubt on the solidity of scientific knowledge and the universality of the law of causality, while Bergson's philosophy stresses

the characteristics of our mental life as revealed in actual experience.

This movement amongst philosophers reflects a more general and growing disillusionment with the extravagant hopes placed in 'science' discussed in the previous chapter. Beginning as a trickle of protest during the Second Empire against certain conclusions of contemporary science, this 'crisis of confidence' acquires during the 1880's and 1890's increasingly vast proportions. Whilst the movement undoubtedly produces a great many positive results, it is also evident, on the purely negative side, that as a consequence of this critique of science a powerful and widespread set of beliefs and source of values was losing its hold over a good many minds - a set of beliefs which had formerly, for many, filled the void left by the decline of traditional religious beliefs. For most of the above-mentioned philosophers, as for Brunetière, the criticism of science is made in the name, at least ultimately, of a near-Christian concept of God, who is the guarantor of the moral values of their world; but what of those who are unable to accept such a 'return to Christianity'? Any attack upon 'science' undermines the whole attempt to construct a new metaphysics upon the basis of it.(*)

According to Brunetière, science has above all shown

(*) Even the apparently positive or affirmative side of the 'anti-positivist' reaction has its ambiguities. Boutroux, Bergson and their followers are attempting to affirm certain positive spiritual values against the apparent negations of nineteenth-century science (the freedom of the 'self', the possibility of moral choice, etc.). But the affirmation of these values is carried by some to a point where the end result is no less negative than the doctrines of science. This will be seen most strikingly in the case of Jarry.

itself impotent to answer three vital questions of man; these are, firstly, "la question de savoir d'où nous venons"; secondly, the question of how we should conduct our lives (that is to say, science has failed to provide a new ethic or basis for ethics); and thirdly, "la question de savoir où nous allons"-that of our "destinée future"(6). The verbal sleight-of-hand in Brunetière's argument is not difficult to see (for example, in the logically gratuitous assumption that we must have a 'destiny' of some kind); behind his critique of 'science' lies in fact the desire to embrace the doctrines of Christianity, and more specifically of the Church, and to harness these to the cause of political and social reaction. Nonetheless, he is not alone in his proclamation of the 'failure' of science. What has produced this apparent withering of former hopes? In part, the answer is simply that 'science', in any sense of the term, could never fulfil the more extravagant of the demands made upon it, and that this was the discovery of the generation to which Brunetière belongs. But the withering of the faith of 'scientism' arises also from a growing realisation of the implications inherent in certain of the doctrines of contemporary science - as distinct from the idea of science.

What most frequently passes for 'science' in these years is an amalgam of doctrines comprising those of philosophical materialism, determinism, and Darwinian evolution. Of these doctrines, the first two tend to be closely linked, and can best be grouped together for the purpose of studying reactions to them. In the course of the nineteenth century, an unbroken series of triumphs in the physical sciences had given men a growing sense that the forces of nature were coming entirely

under control and that an ultimate 'explanation' of the whole of nature was being achieved - an explanation which tended to be more and more in terms of 'matter' and 'force'(7), The principle of the conservation of matter and energy elaborated around the middle of the century by Helmholtz, William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) and others gave rise to the belief that matter (or energy) was eternal and indestructible(8). Moreover, thanks to advances made in the course of the century in physiology and organic chemistry, the 'materialists' believed increasingly that the old vitalism (the belief that in living beings there exists a vital force not governed by general physical laws which controls the life of the organism) and the old spiritualism alike had definitively been destroyed; human physiology and human psychology alike were seen as constituting merely a special case of the general laws of physics and chemistry(9). This materialistic philosophy found its most dogmatic formulation in Germany, in the works of Moleschott, Vogt and Büchner, and later Haeckel. Vogt gave crude expression to the conclusions of many contemporary physiologists by stating that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile"(10), whilst Büchner reduced all reality ultimately to 'matter' and 'force'(*). The most complete fusion of materialism and determinism, along with Darwinism, was achieved in the 'monism' of Haeckel, which, as the name implies, aimed to reduce all

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(*) Kraft und Stoff (1855), translated into French as Force et Matière, 1865. This work appears to have made a considerable impact in France; it went through fifteen editions in Germany between 1855 and 1883, and seven editions in France between 1865 and 1894. Büchner's Science et Nature was translated in 1866.

phenomena to a single 'substance': in the words of Haeckel himself, "le monisme doit aboutir à réduire tous les phénomènes, sans exception, à la mécanique atomique"(11). Owing to the increasing internationalism of science in the nineteenth century, this new philosophy soon found ready acceptance in France also. Moreover, most French thinkers who based themselves upon science also contributed to and strengthened these doctrines. In the early years of the nineteenth century Paris had been the scientific capital of the world, and the traditions established then, in physics as in human physiology, were continued to a great extent in the second half of the century. Particularly noteworthy were developments in France in the middle and second half of the century in the physiology of the brain and nervous system, and the psychology and treatment of mental disease founded upon it(12), giving rise yet again to a view of man which was at once purely mechanistic and deterministic. In the thought of Taine, despite his later denials, the working hypothesis used by science of universal causality becomes an affirmation of a universal and dogmatic determinism; whilst in the popular mind, and again despite later denials, Taine also became a staunch defender of the doctrine of materialism(13). Even the most loyal of the positivists - Littré and Claude Bernard - at times contribute to the materialistic and deterministic doctrines of contemporary science. Despite his own attempts to dissociate positivism and materialism, Littré himself tends at times to express a view of the world as being made up of 'matter' and 'force' exclusively - leading some contemporaries to equate him with Büchner and Moleschott(14). And Bernard - for all his defence of the view

that science deals not in certitudes or 'truths' but in working hypotheses (a view which anticipates the attacks of Boutroux) - inclines at other times to the view of determinism as absolute truth, an iron law governing all phenomena(15). Moreover, in his thought materialism and determinism come together: our mental states are reducible ultimately to physio-chemical activity, and the phenomena of the mind are as rigidly determined as 'material' phenomena.

Yet for these men such doctrines are by no means a source of disillusionment or of the undermining of values. On the contrary, Haeckel's monism is for him a new faith - his little work entitled Der Monismus (French translation Le Monisme, 1897) carries the sub-title (in French) "profession de foi d'un naturaliste"; whilst Büchner claims to find a new basis for ethics in the notion of human solidarity. Theirs is in fact a philosophy of revolt against the domination of Hegelian idealism and Christian orthodoxy(16); and, like the rationalist philosophes of the eighteenth century, they are borne along by the force of their revolt. Bernard fails to realise the contradictions between his determinist psychology and the 'scientific' ethics whose creation he calls for(17). Whilst Taine argues that, far from his determinism making nonsense of all concepts of good and evil, of justice and punishment, it is only within a context of determinism that these concepts have any meaning: it is "impossible sans le déterminisme de fonder le droit de punir, la justice du châtiment"(18).

Nevertheless, others are less affirmative. E.-M. Caro points out in 1882, speaking of Littré and his contribution to ethical thought, that the most dramatic and serious question

of contemporary thought is: can science provide men with ethical ideals? - claiming that Littré has failed to show that it can(19). Certain of the poems of Leconte de Lisle, as of Louise Ackermann (though this is not her final philosophy), give expression to a nihilistic despair occasioned by the findings of contemporary science(20). Indeed, interesting in this connection is Fusil's claim that the best poetry inspired by what he inaccurately calls 'positivism' is a poetry of 'pessimism', "où des esprits inquiets et tourmentés savent en extraire une résignation amère, désenchantée, désespérée"(21). Paul Bourget in Le Disciple (1889) attacks the determinism of Taine (incarnated in the philosopher Adrien Sixte) which he claims undermines all moral values; whilst elsewhere he returns to the attack upon this "doctrine désespérante, imprégnée du déterminisme le plus nihiliste", claiming that "pour des jeunes gens, de telles hypothèses ne dégageaient qu'un principe de négation et de pessimisme"(22).(*) Whilst Pellissier, in his article of 1890 on contemporary 'pessimism', deplores the undermining effect of the doctrine of universal determinism, claiming that a doctrine which considers all our actions to be but "le produit des fatalités tranquilles qui pèsent sur nos vaines agitations" destroys not only "l'idée du devoir" but "la velléité même d'agir"(23). Such comments are legion in the closing decades of the century.

The greatest revolution in nineteenth-century thought,

(*) Such statements upon the part of the 'mature' Bourget must, of course - as in the case of Brunetière -, to some extent be read in the context of his then political views and the (politically motivated) campaign of attack upon the philosophy behind 'naturalist' literature.

however, arose not from discoveries in the realm of the physical sciences but in that of the biological sciences; indeed, in this respect, Darwin - the man most responsible for this revolution - truly deserves the name of 'the Newton of biology'(24). It was not the concept of the evolution of life for which Darwin was responsible (the idea of an evolutionary process goes back at least to Heraclitus); his chief contribution was to provide an explanation of the mechanism of the process acceptable to his contemporaries - an explanation based on the appearance of random variations in species coupled with the workings of 'natural selection'. It was the latter concept in particular - rebaptized by Spencer 'the survival of the fittest' and originally inspired by Malthus' concept of the internecine 'struggle for existence'(25) - which struck Darwin's contemporaries. Nonetheless acceptance of Darwin's theses was by no means immediate; even most naturalists,in England and on the Continent, at first rejected the conclusions of The Origin of Species, and only gradually did informed scientific opinion swing round to agreement with Darwin. It was thus only gradually also that the full implications of Darwinian evolutionism were realised by the general thinking public. On the Continent, it was in Germany that Darwin's ideas were seized upon with the greatest enthusiasm, especially by Haeckel and his fellow-naturalists, in whose hands they ceased to be merely tentative scientific theory to become instead a philosophy, and almost a new religion(26). This German brand of evolutionism had a powerful impact in France, the influence of Haeckel surpassing even that of Büchner and

the earlier materialist school(*), but alongside it Darwin's theories were also transported directly from England to France. Nevertheless, the struggle for acceptance was greater and more protracted in France than in either England or Germany - surprisingly perhaps, in view of the inheritance of the materialistic, deistic and anti-clerical traditions of the Enlightenment(**). The battle continued to rage throughout the 1860's and 1870's, and it was not until 1878 that Darwin was finally elected a correspondent of the Académie des Sciences, his nomination having twice been rejected(***).

(*) Haeckel's Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte (1868) was translated as Histoire de la création des êtres organisés d'après les lois naturelles in 1874. Other works to be translated into French were: L'Anthropogénie ou Histoire de l'évolution humaine (German ed. 1874, trans. 1877); Les Preuves du transformisme (trans. 1879); Le Monisme, lien entre la religion et la science, profession de foi d'un naturaliste (trans. 1897); Les Enigmes de l'Univers (German ed. 1899, trans. 1902).

(**) Predictably, much of the opposition was a result of pure chauvinism: chauvinistic evolutionists resented Darwin's usurpation of honours rightly due (as they saw it) to Lamarck, whilst chauvinistic anti-evolutionists took their stand upon the work of Cuvier. Three leading publishers rejected the idea of a translation of the Origin of Species, and a French edition of the work did not appear until the middle of 1862, after three English, two American and one German edition had already sold out (Cf. G. HIMMELFARB, Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution, London, Chatto & Windus, 1959, pp. 249-250). A second edition appeared in 1866, whilst a translation of The Descent of Man appeared in 1872, this time only a year after the English edition. [De l'Origine des espèces, trad. Mlle Clémence Royer, 1862; 2e éd., 1866; 3e éd., 1870. La Descendance de l'homme, 1872; 2e éd., 1873; 3e éd. 1881.]

(***) Even then he was only elected by a vote of 26 to 14 - and not to the Zoological Section, but to the Botanical Section! (Cf. HIMMELFARB, Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution, p. 359).

The effect of Darwinism upon traditional religious beliefs is a well-known story; for many contemporaries, the concept of a Creator-God seemed to be foreever destroyed, replaced solely by an impersonal, mechanical process; no more devastating attack on Christianity had ever been made. On a broader, philosophical plane, however, the results were extremely diverse. By men of the rationalist and materialist school, Darwin was joyfully embraced as an ally in the anti-Christian, anti-spiritualist crusade. For others, the theory of evolution was above all a source of supremely optimistic, positive convictions, at once broadening and strengthening the concept of inevitable universal progress; Darwin himself felt his conclusions to be a source of optimism, confirming the current belief in progress, and a similar optimism pervades the almost lyrical preface of his French translator, Mlle Clémence Royer, who saw in natural selection a new metaphysics, ethics and political philosophy capable of superceding Christianity, and who, in footnotes to her translation, chided Darwin for his modesty and hesitation(27). Later in the century, pessimists, and optimists, conservatives and revolutionaries, individualists and collectivists, war-mongers and pacifists, to say nothing of racialists, were all to engage battle in the name of a multitude of radically different 'Darwinisms'(28).

But at the same time, to many the theories of Darwin appeared to be overwhelmingly destructive in their implications, ushering in a vision of a world without purpose and of man as a totally insignificant being lost and adrift in the midst of a vast and brutal world of struggle in which he was merely a hapless pawn. In particular, on the purely negative

side, it was Darwin who finally and definitively destroyed the faith of the nineteenth century in 'nature' and its reliance on this concept as a source of ethical and metaphysical belief - a development whose full significance only becomes clear in the light of the repeated laments, in the closing decades of the century, concerning 'la banqueroute de la nature'.

Reference has already been made to the importance of the concept of nature for the non-Christian thinkers of the eighteenth century. In the philosophies of the first half of the nineteenth century, this concept is deepened and 'spiritualised': Nature is conceived of as an organic, living unity, very different from the mechanical universe of Newtonian physics. In the words of Bréhier, the first half of the century is dominated by "une philosophie de la nature qui voit dans la nature et les forces naturelles une réalité stable et permanente", frequently seen as a kind of "âme de l'univers"(29). It is dominated also by a general belief in the 'goodness' of this Nature, and a belief that it forms a fundamentally harmonious whole of which mankind is a part. And the great majority of these conceptions of Nature are finalist conceptions, embodying a sense of metaphysical 'purpose'. These generalisations hold good for the vast majority of thinkers in these years, for German idealist philosophers, French social thinkers and Romantic poets alike(*).

(*) Fusil remarks of romanticism that "le romantisme [...] est dans son ensemble finaliste et religieux, alors même qu'il blasphème" (La Poésie scientifique..., p. 129). Cf. Renan's haughty remark in L'Avenir de la Science: "Il n'y a pas à raisonner avec celui qui pense que l'histoire est une agitation sans but, un mouvement sans résultante"(Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, III, p. 747). Other examples are Fourier with his vision of a harmonious world guided by a divine Providence; Saint-Simon's belief in the goodness of Nature which is merely waiting to be harnessed to the service of man; Proudhon's belief in Justice as a universal reality which /

But at the same time, nineteenth-century thought reacts strongly against the dualism of 'man' and 'nature' to which most thinkers of the eighteenth century continue to hold and which regards man as a being apart - an unrealised heritage of Christian thought most forcefully embodied in the Cartesian tradition. In the words of the philosopher Cournot, the nineteenth century witnesses a tremendous effort to "réintégrer l'homme dans la nature"(30). Or as Dampier puts it:

> during the last hundred or hundred and fifty years, the whole conception of the natural Universe has been changed by the recognition that man, subject to the same physical laws and processes as the world around him, cannot be considered separately from the world, and that scientific methods of observation, induction, deduction and experiment are applicable, not only to the original subject-matter of pure science, but to nearly all the many and varied fields of human thought and activity.(31)

The early nineteenth century tends to hold to a conception of the spiritual unity of man and nature, which is shattered with the rise in the years after 1850 of materialist philosophies - in which the term 'nature' designates no longer an

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/reveals itself in Nature. Whilst amongst French writers and poets, the general outlines of a belief in Nature as an organic, 'spiritual' whole, a 'mystical' unity (with the poet acting as mediator between Nature and the world of man, revealing to the latter his secret 'destiny') is shared by Chateaubriand, Senancour, Lamartine, Hugo, Guérin, Nerval, even Balzac at times, and of course the Baudelaire of "Correspondances" (Cf. inter alia René WELLEK, 'The Concept of Romanticism', in Concepts of Criticism, Yale University Press, 1963, pp. 169-178). The only major writer, according to Wellek (ibid., p. 172), to fall outside this generalisation is Vigny, who "embraces a dualism of man and nature, a pessimistic titanism which is a continuous protest against the order of nature. Nature is dead, silent, and even hostile to man.". Variations upon a generally pantheistic view of the universe are common in these years, however oddly they may be combined with both deistic and even theistic conceptions!

organic, spiritual whole, but merely a totality of physical forces. But these materialist philosophies at the same time strengthen the tendency towards the 'integration' of man into nature. The monist philosophy, by definition, rests on a belief in the unity of all natural phenomena; but this unity is now found in 'matter', "une et indestructible" in the words of Haeckel(32). The 'law' of universal determinism is applied to man also, while at the same time his mental or spiritual life is reduced to the working of the same physio-chemical forces which prevail elsewhere in the universe. It is thus not only the concept of external 'nature' which is transformed, but also that of 'human nature'. The significance of this is far-reaching. The eighteenth century may no longer have believed, as the preceding century had, in the fiction of a universal 'Man', but it did believe firmly in a universal human nature and in the latter's fundamental rationality; indeed such a belief formed a necessary basis for any concept (such as that of Kant) of a universal moral law. But if this 'human nature' or this 'self' is merely the product of physio-chemical forces, then all such ethical concepts are totally deprived of any foundation.

It is the theories of Darwin which, in their implications at least(*), complete this process of 'reintegrating' man into nature and at the same time destroy the concept of nature as a basis for ethics or metaphysics. Man no longer enjoys an *a priori* privileged status, he is no longer 'king of the

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(*) In *The Origin of Species* Darwin had not considered mankind in detail, but the implications of his general theory were obvious to all. He returned to this question in *The Descent of Man* (1871, Fr. trans. 1872), as did Huxley in *Man's Place in Nature* (1863).

universe', but a mere creature amongst creatures, a 'beast' amongst beasts (whence the portrayal, in much of 'naturalist' literature, of 'la bête humaine'). Moreover, as a part of the physical world, man is subject to the same laws as the rest of the universe; thus Darwin's theories tend to reinforce the materialist and determinist conceptions of man and of society. As the critic Pellissier saw it:

> Comment échapperions-nous à la nature si nous en faisons partie intégrante, si nous obéissons aux mêmes lois qui la régissent, s'il n'y a vraiment de différence entre nous et les autres êtres que celle d'un organisme plus compliqué?(33)

Man is no longer the master of his fate, but the victim of blind, uncontrollable forces. At the same time, the theory of evolution further strengthens that philosophy of Becoming which, finding its first major expression in the philosophy of Hegel, comes to dominate the whole of nineteenth-century metaphysical thought: far from nature being, in Bréhier's words, "une réalité stable et permanente", there is no fixed, eternal nature - and hence there can be no fixed, eternal values based on nature; there is only a perpetual flux, a perpetual devenir; whence the triumph of that relativism which Edmond Scherer had so deplored. But Darwin's theories, whilst strengthening the philosophy of Becoming, also help to divest it of all its former finalist assumptions; in its implications, the theory of natural selection is the negation of all teleology. The term 'natural selection' is in fact a misleading one, since it suggests a conscious agent (namely 'nature') at work; and it is true that Darwin himself tended to speak as if he believed this to be so, and that his views on the question of teleology were muddled and frequently self-contradictory. On balance, however, he tended to deny any

teleological view of nature (stating explicitly in the Origin that the 'selection' effected by an organism's environment is a purely mechanical process), and he also warned his readers against a literal interpretation of the metaphors he was obliged to use. In any case, most of his defenders and the vast majority of his critics took his view of nature to be a purely mechanistic or 'materialistic' one, and an affirmation of the self-sufficiency of nature(34). Whence Pellissier's claim that nineteenth-century science had made of nature merely

> un mécanisme aveugle et sourd, une succession de phénomènes qui se déterminent les uns les autres, et dont l'étroite contexture ne laisse même aucune échappatoire à notre propre activité. La nature ne manifeste point une raison immanente dont elle serait l'image sensible, une Providence qui aurait tracé le plan de l'univers et qui en assurerait l'ordre.(35)

Thus not only has 'science', as Brunetière and others claimed, failed to provide an 'explanation' of the world (in terms of purpose or meaning), it has in fact arrived at the conclusion that there is no purpose to be found.

Finally, and most significant of all - since this was the real originality of Darwin's theory of evolution -, his explanation of the mechanism of the evolutionary process - the 'struggle for existence' - appeared to destroy any foundation in nature for the concepts of good and evil, of justice and morality. In the terms of Huxley's image, nature appeared as an immense arena in which all creatures were gladiators. It was this conception of 'nature, red in tooth and claw' (as Tennyson put it) which most struck contemporaries. Later in the century, in France and elsewhere, the term 'struggle for life' was to become a catchword amongst those seeking a theoretical justification for their would-be

defiance of all ethical norms; whilst even many scarcely suspect of this opportunism came to look at society through Darwinian eyes, with ethically disastrous results: according to Pellissier, "l'univers tout entier nous apparaît comme un immense champ de bataille" in which "il faut lutter pour vivre, et la lutte pour la vie, qui est la vie même, détruit toute justice et toute vertu"(36). Thus the theories of Darwin end by definitively ruining all attempts to deduce an ethic from a basis in nature. Whence the attempt of men like Brunetière to draw a radical distinction between "le règne naturel" and "le règne humain"(37). And whence also the general movement back towards a classical dualism of man and nature in the 'anti-positivist reaction' and the 'idealist revival' of the end of the nineteenth century.

Such were the implications of the Darwinian theories - or such at least were the conclusions which many thinkers drew from them more and more frequently as the nineteenth century drew to a close. But it must be stressed that many of these implications became apparent only gradually to the majority of thinking men. It was not the young but the mature Huxley who conjured up an image of the horrors and cruelty of nature. The young Huxley, for all his 'agnosticism', believed as firmly as did the young Renan in a divine providence working through the events of the world and in "the absolute justice of the system of things"(38); and it was only in his speeches and writings of the late 1880's and the 1890's that he came to draw his celebrated contrast between the 'cosmic process' and an 'ethical process' which must be the very opposite of it: "The ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process [...], but in combating it."(39) On the other hand, so much was at stake that where Darwin's theories

did eventually win acceptance the emotional shock frequently entailed was considerable, to say the least. Amongst the more extreme reactions was that of Friedrich Nietzsche, in whose thought the Darwinian revelation (although he tried to obscure the fact) lay at the root of his proclamation of 'the death of God'; with God dead, all semblance of purpose in existence gone, and the distinction between man and beast removed, European man was confronted, in Nietzsche's view, with a collapse of all viable human values, leaving a void which he named 'nihilism'(*). The reaction of many other metaphysical-minded thinkers was similar if less melodramatic. Whilst there were some who, like Sully-Prudhomme in his long poem La Justice (1878),could survey the immense spectacle of nature - the internecine warfare of the 'struggle for life' -, and still retain a fragile optimism and a Kantian belief in the validity of man's inner sense of justice, others - of whom Lahor, Laforgue and Barrès are typical examples - conclude, on a theoretical plane at least, at a nihilism similar to that of Nietzsche.

To sum up, the closing decades of the nineteenth century in France witness a radical decline both of the faith in 'science' which had characterised the previous generation, and of attempts

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(*) It was upon his expectation of the triumph of Darwinism that Nietzsche based his prediction of the coming war of all against all: "If the doctrines of sovereign Becoming, of the fluidity of all [...] species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal - doctrines which I consider true but deadly - are hurled into the people for another generation [...] then nobody should be surprised when [...] brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers [...] will appear on the arena of the future." (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, II, 1874, cited by W. KAUFMANN, Nietzsche, New York, 1956, p. 142.)

to base ethical and metaphysical beliefs upon the concept of nature - leading to the proclamation of both 'la faillite de la science' and 'la banqueroute de la nature'. The latter provides a clue to the consciously 'anti-natural' tendencies of the 'decadent' movement of the 1880's. Whilst to many, the progress of knowledge appears to have led, on an ethical and metaphysical plane, only to destruction and negation, to the 'death' of all former absolutes. The young Barrès echoes the sentiments of his generation when he writes: "L'ennui baille sur ce monde décoloré par les savants. Tous les dieux sont morts et trop lointains [...]"(40) - a situation which he attributes directly to the findings of contemporary science. And even such an urbane sceptic as Anatole France voices a similar lament: "Nous avons mangé les fruits de l'arbre de la science, et il nous est resté dans la bouche un goût de cendre."(41)

The source of such lamentations, particularly in the case of Barrès, is to be found in large part in the later influence of the very man who had once, for many contemporaries, incarnated the 'religion of science': Ernest Renan. Renan's work after 1870 offers perhaps the most striking example of any of the decline of the 'scientist' faith; the works written in the last twenty or so years of his life reveal a weakening and even a crumbling of many of his former beliefs, which give place to an ironic scepticism and a form of 'intellectual dilettantism'. To many younger contemporaries, in fact, Renan comes to appear as an apostle of nihilism(*). Yet the influence of this man

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(*) Barrès, in particular, as a young man, is the spokesman for such a view of Renan. Paul Bourget, in his Essais de psychologie contemporaine (1883), tends to see him in a similar light. The symbolist critic Téodor de Wyzewa, in a hostile /

upon the generation of Barrès is greater than that of any other thinker. In view of this fact, a brief examination of the decline of Renan's faith in 'science' and its consequences - and indeed of his later philosophy as a whole - can be highly instructive.

Four main features of the thought of the later Renan are of interest here: his metaphysical scepticism; his political and social pessimism; his ethical nihilism and 'intellectual dilettantism'; and his belief in the corrosiveness of thought or 'reason'.

Renan's philosophy in the years after 1870 is marked by a growing scepticism with regard to any metaphysical or religious knowledge, and with regard to the concept of finality in the universe. Whilst at times reaffirming belief in philosophical 'idealism', he also admits the failure of his quest for metaphysical truth: "'Nous ne savons pas', voilà tout ce qu'on peut dire de clair sur ce qui est au delà du fini."(42) Elsewhere he speaks of "l'incertitude de nos idées sur le but à atteindre et sur la fin ultérieure de l'humanité.[...] Rien

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/ article on 'La philosophie de M. Renan' in the Revue contemporaine (25 Dec. 1885), which discussed Le Prêtre de Nèmi, claims that many contemporaries see this work as "une démonstration du néant qui est sous les théories, les actes, les mots [...] son intention d'être nihiliste [...] est devenue manifeste". Brunetière in 1882 appears to take a similarly negative view of Renan; he quotes the latter, with apparent agreement, on the loss of metaphysical and religious foundations for moral values ("nous vivons de l'ombre d'une ombre...", etc.). And in 1889, like Barrès, he accuses Renan of playing lightly with words and ideas such as 'God', 'religion', 'philosophy', and so on; behind these terms, which Renan bandies about, there lies (according to Brunetière) no reality in which he believes; he is merely juggling with words (Pages sur Ernest Renan, ed. Pierre Moreau, Paris, 1920, pp. 60, 107-111). Edouard Rod in 1891, in a curious alignment of the 'positive' and 'negative' thinkers of his time, sees Renan as being "à l'origine d'un courant négatif, qui va grossissant pendant une période d'une quarantaine d'années" (Les Idées morales du temps présent, Paris, 1891, p.iv. Italics in original.).

ne nous indique quelle est la volonté de la nature, ni le but de l'univers.[...] la destinée humaine est devenue plus obscure que jamais."(43)(*). Even where he does appear to still hold to a belief in the ultimate realisation of his metaphysical 'Ideal' (or 'God'), mankind and this earth are no longer associated with this realisation, and in the final analysis mankind's contribution to the process is of negligeable significance: "Il se peut que tout le développement humain n'ait pas plus de conséquence que la mousse ou le lichen dont s'entoure toute surface humectée."(44)(**). Increasingly, however, he

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(*) It is surely with an irony born of scepticism that he writes in the preface to his Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse (1883): "Il n'est pas sûr que la Terre ne manque pas sa destinée, comme cela est probablement arrivé à des mondes innombrables; il est même possible que notre temps soit un jour considéré comme le point culminant après lequel l'humanité n'aura fait que déchoir [...]. Courage, courage, nature![...] Vise, vise encore le but que tu manques depuis l'éternité; tâche d'enfiler le trou imperceptible du pertuis qui mène à un autre ciel. Tu as l'infini de l'espace et l'infini du temps pour ton expérience. Quand on a le droit de se tromper impunément, on est toujours sûr de réussir." (Oeuvres complètes, II, p. 722.)

(**) The first signs of this line of thought are to be found in the Dialogues philosophiques written in 1871. Also to be found in this work are the beginnings of a shaking of Renan's earlier serene confidence in the 'goodness' of Nature. Here he has been confronted with Schopenhauer and the German philosopher's belief (at least as interpreted by Renan) that Nature is 'evil' - a belief which is itself an early symptom of the coming crisis in ethical thought based upon the concept of Nature. In the face of Schopenhauer, Renan frequently reaffirms his belief in the goodness of Nature (e.g. in his essay on Amiel of 1884; in his Examen de conscience philosophique of 1888; and in the preface to Feuillés détachées (1892)); yet at the same time he admits the absolute amorality of Nature, its indifference to good and evil, and even its tyranny and 'machiavellianism'; man is merely a victim and helpless dupe of natural forces: "nous sommes exploités [...] nous sommes le jouet d'un égoïsme supérieur"; "la Nature agit à notre égard comme envers une troupe de gladiateurs destinés à se faire tuer pour une cause qui n'est pas la leur [...]" (Cf. Dialogues philosophiques, in Oeuvres complètes, I, pp. 565, 568, 573, 574, 576, 578). Later, he again admits that "aux yeux de la raison" Nature is "injuste et immorale" (Amiel, in Feuilles détachées; O.C., II, p. 1157). Frequently, in fact, Renan's belief in the 'goodness' of Nature seems merely to amount to /

falls back upon a strict positivist position: an acceptance of merely 'positive', scientific truths, and their practical application. His reiterated belief in the value of 'science' tends now to be a belief merely in its value in satisfying intellectual curiosity and in the material benefits of its application: "La science restera toujours la satisfaction du plus haut désir de notre nature, la curiosité; elle fournira à l'homme le seul moyen qu'il ait pour améliorer son sort."(45) Even Renan's attempts (for which Barrès will later praise him) to preserve 'le sentiment religieux' - "gardons la catégorie de l'inconnu, la possibilité de rêver"(46) - are, as the terms imply, an implicit admission of his failure to provide any specific, positive beliefs. At best, Renan tends towards the adoption of an 'As if' position: man must act <u>as if</u> God, the soul, an after-life, and so on, existed(*). Yet this too

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(*) This is suggested in several passages of Renan's later writings - for example in his essay on Amiel of 1884 ("Il faut y tenir, même contre l'évidence" - <u>O.C.</u>, II, p. 1159), and most explicitly in the <u>Examen de conscience philosophique</u> of 1888, speaking of religious belief: "L'attitude la plus logique du penseur devant la religion est de faire comme si elle était vraie. Il faut agir comme si Dieu et l'âme existaient.[...] Le paradis éternel promis à l'homme n'a pas de réalité, et pourtant, il faut agir comme s'il en avait."(<u>O.C.</u>, II, p. 1177). Such a position should be adopted, Renan implies - and here his 'aristocratism' becomes evident -, for the sake of the populace. However, nowhere does he seem to press firmly for its adoption.

It has been argued that elements of such a 'fictionalist' philosophy are present in Renan's thought throughout the whole /

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/ an acceptance of the view that 'whatever is, is right'. Nevertheless, he still asserts, paradoxically, that man must 'follow nature', condemning what he sees as the ethical attitude of 'revolt' of Schopenhauer: "Si la nature a un but, il faut s'y prêter [...]. La morale se réduit ainsi à la soumission." (<u>Dialogues philosophiques</u>, <u>O.C.</u>, I, p. 579). He even states that: "Le grand homme doit collaborer à la fraude qui est à la base de l'univers."(<u>ibid.</u>, p. 580). Given Renan's premises, it is scarcely surprising that many failed to share his conclusions.

is an implicit admission of the same failure.

In political and social, and in ethical matters, Renan's attitude is likewise one of scepticism and disillusionment. He sees the contemporary world as victim of a rising tide of democratic forces, which for him (as for many another aristocratic or patrician mind) means the triumph of egalitarianism, and with it mediocrity and uniformity. In all his major writings after 1870, from the Dialogues philosophiques through La Réforme intellectuelle et morale, Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse, his Drames philosophiques, the Examen de conscience philosophique, to the preface to L'Avenir de la Science of 1890, he expresses an increasingly profound political and social pessimism. The preface to Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse (1883) is typical:

> Le temps présent est sombre, et je n'augure pas bien de l'avenir prochain. Notre pauvre pays est toujours sous la menace de la rupture d'un anévrisme, et l'Europe entière est travaillée de quelque mal profond.(47).

The drama Le Prêtre de Némi (1885) shows the triumph of ignor-

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/ of his life: "so much was the philosophy of 'As-if' in the intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century, that from his earliest writings he [Renan] shows an acute awareness of its importance. It is indeed true to say that the idea of the conscious pretence, the 'useful lie', becomes an indispensable key to the exploration of his thought." (Colin SMITH, 'The Fictionalist Element in Renan's Thought', French Studies, vol. 9, 1955, p. 30). Smith shows the momentary presence of such a train of thought even in the youthful L'Avenir de la Science, as well as its more sustained presence in his later thought. Certain of the statements of the later Renan quoted in the following pages could, indeed, conceivably be read in this sense also. However, Smith agrees that although Renan "saw the nobility of such a fiction", he had little confidence that mankind as a whole could embrace a similar philosophy with any hope of tranquillity, whilst even for his own part his attitude was not consistent: "He was not wholly at one with Antistius, and felt some nostalgia for the solid, comforting beliefs of old."(ibid., p. 40).

ance, prejudice and evil over reason and idealism, portraying "le cauchemar d'une nation sans idéal"(48). Ethically, he is equally pessimistic, even joining the ranks of those proclaiming the 'decadence' of modern civilisation. Already in the Dialogues philosophiques he had envisaged that "une irrémédiable décadence de l'espèce humaine est possible"(49). This is particularly so as a result of the decline of religious and metaphysical beliefs:

> Les vieilles croyances au moyen desquelles on aidait l'homme à pratiquer la vertu sont ébranlées, et elles n'ont pas été remplacées.[.1.] Nous vivons de l'ombre d'une ombre. De quoi vivra-t-on après nous?(50)(*)

In the foreword to Le Prêtre de Némi Renan speaks of "cette grande crise que l'avènement de l'esprit positif fait subir de nos jours aux croyances morales"(51). And in the preface to L'Avenir de la Science he sees an inevitable "abaissement réel du moral de l'humanité" as a result of mankind's having seen "la réalité des choses":

> A force de chimères, on avait réussi à obtenir du bon gorille un effort moral surprenant; ôtées les chimères, une partie de l'énergie factice qu'elles éveillaient disparaîtra.(52)

Thus, finally, Renan sees contemporary thought as having led to a complete ethical impasse: "Je le dis franchement, je ne me figure pas comment on rebâtira, sans les anciens rêves, les assises d'une vie noble et généreuse."(53)

Yet faced with this situation, Renan has nothing to

(*) Renan, like his disciple Barrès after him, was fond of repeating phrases to which he was particularly attached. In the preface to Feuilles détachées (1892) he writes: "Un immense abaissement moral, et peut-être intellectuel, suivrait le jour où la religion disparaîtrait du monde.[...] Les personnes religieuses vivent d'une ombre. Nous vivons de l'ombre d'une ombre. De quoi vivra-t-on après nous?" (Oeuvres complètes, II, p. 944).

offer; he can only state and restate the despairing conclusion:

> L'ordre social, comme l'ordre théologique, provoque la question: Qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste? L'édifice de la société humaine porte sur un grand vide. Nous avons osé le dire.(54)

His own final ethical attitude is compounded of a growing defeatism in the face of the above situation, an ethical relativism which tends towards a complete nihilism, and a sensualistic hedonism (already frankly embraced in the preface to Caliban, 1878) which is a consequence of the latter. His attitude to the problems of the world around him is a defeatist 'laissez-faire':

> Laissons donc, sans nous troubler, les destinées de la planète s'accomplir. Nos cris n'y feront rien; notre mauvaise humeur serait déplacée.(55)

He claims to be "peiné de l'espèce d'agitation que je vois dans la jeunesse", yet the only advice he has to offer to the young people of his time is:

> chers enfants, c'est inutile de se donner tant de mal à la tête pour n'arriver qu'à changer d'erreur. Amusez-vous, puisque vous avez vingt ans; travaillez aussi.(56)

He even states that the only goal to strive for is a stoic withdrawal from life, the creation of "un rêve où l'on vive à l'abri des turpitudes ambiantes"(57). Whilst elsewhere, defining 'salvation' as "ce qui donne à chacun son motif de vivre", he adds, in his own unwitting version of Dostoyevsky's 'tout est permis':

> Le moyen de salut n'est pas le même pour tous. Pour l'un, c'est la vertu; pour l'autre, l'ardeur du vrai; pour un autre, l'amour de l'art; pour d'autres, la curiosité, l'ambition, les voyages, le luxe, les femmes, la richesse; au plus bas degré, la morphine et l'alcool.(58)

The benevolent indulgence of the later Renan for the follies of the human race fails to hide his own ultimate ethical nihilism.

His ethical attitude is paralled by an intellectual attitude which he himself calls, adopting the formula of Amiel, "l'épicuréisme de l'imagination"(59), and which is perhaps better called 'intellectual dilettantism'. His growing metaphysical and religious scepticism does not reduce him to silence on these subjects; on the contrary, he continues to involve himself with metaphysical and religious concepts, but now his tendency is to treat them playfully, to indulge in brilliant paradoxes, and as a consequence to trivialise those very same ideas. Philosophy comes to be considered as merely an intellectual amusement, a detached "contemplation de la réalité, de la spectroscopie de l'univers"(60). This tendency towards trivialisation and irony is already clear in the preface (1876) to the Dialogues et fragments philosophiques - "la bonne humeur", he remarks, "est [...] le correctif de toute philosophie"(61) - and is accentuated in later writings. In his essay on Amiel Renan systematizes his attitude of 'intellectual dilettantism', defining it as: "S'abandonner, suivant les heures, à la confiance, au scepticisme, à l'optimisme, à l'ironie; voilà le moyen d'être sûr qu'au moins par moments on a été dans le vrai."(62) But this embracing of everything is an affirmation of nothing, as he himself makes abundantly clear, describing as his own the "conclusion définitive" of Amiel when the latter writes:

> Toutes les convictions particulières, les principes touchants, les formules accusées, les idées infusibles ne sont que des préjugés utiles à la pratique, mais des étroitesses d'esprit. L'absolu de détail est absurde et contradictoire. Les partis politiques, religieux, esthétiques, littéraires, sont des ankyloses de la pensée. Toute croyance spéciale est une raideur et une obtusité [...].(63)

Finally, Renan justifies his playing lightly with ideas and subjects considered by others to be of the utmost seriousness by the argument: "si le monde est une mauvaise farce, par la gaieté nous la rendons bonne"(64).

The final tendency of Renan's thought in these years which must be noted here is his attitude towards the progress of (scientific) knowledge and towards 'reason'. As early as 1871, he had expressed a fear of the consequences of this progress: "Un grand danger [...] vient de l'accumulation indéfinie des données de la science [...]"(65). And: "Il est probable que les moments les plus dangereux dans la vie d'une planète sont ceux où la science arrive à démasquer ses espérances"(66). He had voiced the feat "que le cerveau humain ne s'écrase sous son propre poids, et qu'il ne vienne un moment où son progrès même ne soit sa décadence"(67) - a sentiment echoed by Théoctiste, Renan's spokesman in the third section of the Dialogues philosophiques: "Je n'ai jamais dit que l'avenir fût gai. Qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste?"(68). The latter phrase is repeated in the preface to Le Prêtre de Némi (1885) and again in the preface to Feuilles détachées (1892): "qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste? Ne soyons pas si pressés de la connaître."(69) This pessimistic view is linked to a growing belief in the inevitable corrosiveness of 'reason' (or 'thought': the two terms are here synonymous). Finally, Renan comes to see the situation of metaphysical and moral nihilism described above as an inevitable consequence of the operation of reason, of the ravages of thought. The idea is voiced as early as 1871, and remains present in his thought until the end:

> L'homme, par le progrès de la réflexion, reconnaît de plus en plus les roueries de la nature, démolit par la critique religion, amour, bien, vrai. Ira-t-il jusqu'au bout, ou la nature l'emportera-t-elle? Les planètes mortes sont peut-être celles où la critique a tué les ruses de la nature, et quelquefois je m'imagine que, si tout le monde arrivait à notre philosophie, le monde s'arrêterait.(70)(*)

Such are the conclusions to which the philosophy of Renan appears to have led in the last twenty years of his life. And such are the conclusions which were transmitted to those who reached intellectual maturity in the years 1880-1900 - or which they themselves deduced from the works of Renan. These conclusions - and the developments outlined in this chapter - all help to create a climate of what, at the time, is commonly described as 'pessimism'. But this pessimism is in fact a far-reaching phenomenon, one which contains many ambiguities. It is to an examination of that phenomenon, and of the question of the 'influence' of that arch-pessimist Schopenhauer, that we must now turn.

(*) A similar conviction will become the starting-point, for Barrès and others of his generation, of a consistent anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism. It is interesting to find in the preface to Renan's Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse a seeming prediction of a coming wave of irrationalism provoked by current rationalist excesses - a prediction which might serve as an epigraph to the intellectual history of the generation which he nurtured: "Plus l'homme se développe par la tête, plus il rêve le pôle contraire, c'est-à-dire l'irrationnel, le repos dans la complète ignorance, la femme qui n'est que femme, l'être instinctif qui n'agit que par l'impulsion d'une conscience obscure." (Oeuvres complètes, II, p. 716).

Chapter III: REFERENCES.

(1) F. BRUNETIÈRE, 'Après une visite au Vatican', Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 Jan. 1895, p. 104.

(2) In particular in his Rapport sur la philosophie en France au dix-neuvième siècle, Paris, 1re éd. 1867, 5e éd. 1904.

(3) Lachelier's influence was exercised mainly through his teaching at the Ecole Normale Supérieure from 1864 to 1875.

(4) Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, 1888; Matière et Mémoire, 1896; L'Évolution créatrice, 1907; and later works.

(5) La Science et l'hypothèse, 1902; La Valeur de la science, 1906; Science et méthode, 1908.

(6) BRUNETIÈRE, art. cit., pp. 99-100.

(7) Cf. W. C. DAMPIER, A History of Science and its Relations with Philosophy and Religion, Cambridge U.P., 4th ed., 1961, chapter on 'Nineteenth-century Physics'.

(8) DAMPIER, op. cit., pp. 226-8.

(9) Cf. ibid., chapter on 'Nineteenth-century Biology', esp. pp. 262-3.

(10) ibid., p. 305.

(11) E. HAECKEL, Le Monisme, lien entre la religion et la science, profession de foi d'un naturaliste, Paris, 1897, p. 21.

(12) Cf. DAMPIER, op. cit., p. 305.

(13) Cf. D. G. CHARLTON, Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire, pp. 137, 142, 151-2.

(14) ibid., p. 63.

(15) ibid., p. 80.

(16) Cf. DAMPIER, op. cit., p. 306.

(17) Cf. CHARLTON, op. cit., p

(18) In his reply to Bourget's Le Disciple (1889). Cited by CHARLTON, op. cit., p. 151.

(19) Article in the Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 May 1882, pp. 35, 37ff. Cited by CHARLTON, op. cit., p. 70.

(20) Cf. C. A. FUSIL, La Poésie scientifique de 1750 à nos jours, Paris, 1918.

(21) ibid., p. 131.

(22) BOURGET, Drames de famille [a collection of 'nouvelles'], Plon-Nourrit, 1900, pp. 3-5.

(23) PELLISSIER, 'Le Pessimisme dans la littérature contemporaine', in Essais de littérature contemporaine, Paris, 1893, p. 13.

(24) Cf. DAMPIER, op. cit., p. 252.

(25) ibid., p. 275.

(26) Cf. ibid., p. 280.

(27) Cf. Gertrude HIMMELFARB, Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution, London, Chatto & Windus, 1959, p. 249.

(28) Cf. ibid., and C. BOUGLÉ, 'Le Darwinisme en sociologie', Revue de métaphysique et de morale, 1910, pp. 79-92.

(29) Emile BRÉHIER, Histoire de la philosophie [redacted], tome 2, fasc. III, p. 576.

(30) Cited by BOUGLÉ, art. cit., p. 79.

(31) DAMPIER, A History of Science and its Relations with Philosophy and Religion, p. 200.

(32) HAECKEL, Le monisme, p. 63.

(33) PELLISSIER, 'Le Pessimisme dans la littérature contemporaine', p. 15.

(34) Cf. HIMMELFARB, op. cit., chapter 16, 'Mechanism and Teleology'.

(35) PELLISSIER, art. cit., p. 14.

(36) ibid., pp. 16-17.

(37) Cited by BOUGLÉ, 'Le Darwinisme en sociologie', p. 87.

(38) Cited by HIMMELFARB, op. cit., p. 322.

(39) ibid., p. 335.

(40) BARRÈS, Les Taches d'encre, III, 1885, p. 33.

(41) FRANCE, 'Pourquoi sommes-nous tristes?', La Vie littéraire, 3e série, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, s.d., p. 7.

(42) RENAN, Preface to Feuilles détachées (1892), in Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, Calmann-Lévy, II, p. 944.

(43) Preface to L'Avenir de la Science (1890), in O.C., III, pp. 725-6.

(44) ibid., p. 723.

(45) ibid., p. 727.

(46) Preface to Feuilles détachées, O.C., II, p. 945.

(47) O.C., II, p. 718.

(48) 'Avant-propos' to Le Prêtre de Némi, O.C., III, p. 528.

(49) Dialogues philosophiques, (1871), O.C., I, p. 591.

(50) Preface to Dialogues et fragments philosophiques (1876), O.C., I, p. 557.

(51) O.C., III, p. 529.

(52) O.C., III, p. 726.

(53) Preface to L'Avenir de la Science, O.C., III, pp. 726-7.

(54) 'Avant-propos' to Le Prêtre de Némi, O.C., III, p. 530.

(55) Preface to Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse (1883), O.C., II, p. 722.

(56) Preface to Feuilles détachées, O.C., II, p. 941.

(57) Letter to G. Séailles, cit. CHARLTON, Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire, p. 124.

(58) Essay on Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1884), in Feuilles détachées, O.C., II, p. 1153.

(59) ibid., p. 1159.

(60) 'Lettre à M. Gustave Flaubert'(1874), in Feuilles détachées, O.C., II, p. 1135.

(61) O.C., I, p. 556.

(62) Feuilles détachées, O.C., II, p. 1159.

(63) ibid., p. 1161.

(64) ibid., p. 1160.

(65) Dialogues philosophiques, O.C., I, p. 591.

(66) ibid., p. 620.

(67) ibid., p. 591.

(68) ibid., p. 614.

(69) O.C., II, p. 941.

(70) Dialogues philosophiques, O.C., I, p. 580.

Chapter IV: SCHOPENHAUER AND THE AMBIGUITY OF 'PESSIMISM'.

Testimonies abound to the vogue of 'pessimism' in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Denunciations and apologies echo from professorial chairs at the Sorbonne, fill the columns of newspapers and journals, and form the subject of numerous books and essays. Much of this 'pessimism' is of course purely a product of fashion; but it is impossible to ignore completely the vast number of testimonies to its existence and importance. Critics in the 1880's see the literature of their time as being "atteinte jusqu'aux moelles de ce pessimisme universel"(1), and claim that the literature of France, after passing through the phases of Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism and Dilettantism [sic], "semble vouloir s'appeler aujourd'hui, décidément, le pessimisme"(2). Equally widespread is the vogue of Schopenhauer. Paul Janet observes in 1877 that "au moment présent, il serait impossible de méconnaître l'influence de notre penseur"(3). J. Bourdeau writes in 1884 that "le nom de Schopenhauer est dans toutes les bouches; on le commente dans les chaires de philosophie, on le cite dans les salons"(4). The columns of Le Figaro in the mid-1880's are full of discussions of Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is above all amongst the young writers and intellectuals of France - 'la jeunesse intellectuelle' - that Schopenhauer is in vogue: Remy de Gourmont claims that Schopenhauer had been the philosophical educator of his generation(5), and Edouard Rod that he had been "accepté comme un guide, comme une sorte de directeur de conscience, par une jeunesse désabusée et triste, qui a pris pour refrains habituels ses plus lugubres aphorismes"(6). The questions of pessimism and of the vogue of Schopenhauer in

these years are so intertwined that it seems impossible to separate them. Both of them, moreover, are far more complex phenomena than is generally recognized, much of what is commonly called 'pessimism' coming more properly under the heading (in the senses defined in chapter one) of nihilism.

However, there is often a considerable gap between a philosophical system and the general understanding any age has of that system. It is necessary therefore to establish how Schopenhauer was being presented to the French public in these years. First of all, a few factual and chronological details are called for(*). A trickle of interest began in the 1850's with references to Schopenhauer in a number of philosophical works, and a few articles devoted to his philosophy(7), and interest continued to grow throughout the 1860's(8). However, it was really only from 1870 onwards that Schopenhauer began to become widely known. A great deal of interest was aroused by Challemel-Lacour's article of 1870 in the Revue des Deux Mondes (an important vehicle, from 1870 onwards, of the transmission of German ideas into France), 'Un Bouddhiste contemporain en Allemagne: Arthur Schopenhauer'(9), and even more by the masterly exposition of La Philosophie de Schopenhauer by Théodule Ribot(10). Ribot's study provoked a veritable avalanche of articles, books and, at last, translations(11).(**)

(*) This subject has already been treated by A. BAILLOT, L'Influence de la philosophie de Schopenhauer en France (1860-1900), Paris, Vrin, 1927. But Baillot's discussion contains a great many gaps, even in his bibliography of works dealing with Schopenhauer in France. Moreover, Baillot fails to realise the complexity of the 'pessimism' he is dealing with, and at the same time tends to assume that any simple analogies or parallels with Schopenhauer which he finds are clear cases of direct influence.

(**) Amongst the books which followed, Caro's Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle. Leopardi - Schopenhauer - Hartmann /

At the same time, Schopenhauer's 'disciple' Eduard von Hartmann was becoming known in France; two articles by him were published in the Revue philosophique in 1876 and 1877(12), and in 1877 there appeared a translation of his chief work, first published in 1869, Die Philosophie des Unbewussten(13). The thought of the two men was commonly, though incorrectly, equated, and above all both were seen as exponents of an essentially identical pessimism(14).

How was Schopenhauer presented by these various exponents and commentators? It must be admitted that a complete understanding of his philosophy in these years is rare. The early commentators are struck above all by certain eccentricities of

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/ (1878, 2e éd. 1880, 4e éd. 1889) had the greatest influence. Details of the translations are as follows:
Essai sur le libre arbitre, tr. S. Reinach, Paris, Germer Baillière, 1877, 3 éd. 1886.
Le Fondement de la morale, tr. Auguste Burdeau, Germer Baillière, 1879, 2e éd. 1885, 7e éd. 1925.
Parerga et Paralipomena. Aphorismes sur la sagesse dans la vie, tr. J. A. Cantacuzène, Germer Baillière, 1880.
Pensées, maximes et fragments, tr., annoté et précédé d'une vie de Schopenhauer par J. Bourdeau, Germer Baillière, 1880 (167pp.).
Pensées et fragments, tr. J. Bourdeau; Vie de Schopenhauer, sa correspondance, Germer Baillière, 1881, 4e éd. 1884, 16e éd. 1900 (231pp.).
De la Quadruple racine du principe de la raison suffisante, tr. J. A. Cantacuzène, Germer Baillière, 1882.
The first translation of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung was published in 1886 by J. A. Cantacuzène, reputedly in Paris, Leipzig and Bucharest (! the Bibliothèque Nationale copy bears the imprint Leipzig only); however this translation seems to have been less well known than another, which was to become the definitive French translation, by Auguste Burdeau, Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation, published in three volumes by Alcan between 1888 and 1890. (This translation had been announced by Germer Baillière as being 'sous presse' ever since 1879!) Cantacuzène also published Schopenhauer's Critique de la philosophie kantienne at Bucharest in 1889.

the man himself - his misogyny, if not misanthropy -, and by the esoteric side of his thought, in particular what is commonly called his 'Buddhism'. Where his theory of the Will is commented upon, it is usually to stress the influence of earlier French thought on Schopenhauer (in particular, that of the physiologists Cabanis and Bichat)(15). A similar lack of complete understanding characterizes Challemel-Lacour's influential article of 1870. After the inevitable account of the philosopher's life, Challemel-Lacour attempts an exposition of his philosophy of the Will and of the world as 'representation', the place in his system of art and asceticism, the workings of the 'Génie de l'espèce' and relations between the sexes, and the nature of his pessimism; but the discussion is confused and conducted with little sympathy. The author is obviously shocked by certain doctrines and conclusions of the German philosopher, and takes refuge in the view of a 'Buddhistic' Schopenhauer ("Nous sommes ici en plein bouddhisme"(16)). Above all, he sees in Schopenhauer not a philosopher but a 'moraliste', a writer and thinker whose 'esprit' is in the best French tradition(17). A similar line of explaining away Schopenhauer in terms of his 'Buddhism' and his personal eccentricities is taken by numerous successive commentators also; yet for all their criticism, open or implied, of Schopenhauer's doctrines, they contribute to the spread of those doctrines; and even where learned critics profess to be shocked by certain of his ideas, the stream of articles nonetheless continues.

In marked contrast is Ribot's masterly critical exposition of 1874. Ribot too stresses the 'Buddhism' of Schopenhauer, and he too claims to consider that it is essentially as a

moralist and a superb stylist that Schopenhauer will survive. But his exposition is a model of completeness and lucidity, though frequently dense and technical. He follows the four parts of Schopenhauer's exposition in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung - his philosophy of the world as 'representation', that of the world as 'Will', his philosophy of art, and his ethical philosophy -, giving due emphasis to each. A similar lucidity (and technicality) is to be found in Paul Janet's discussion of Schopenhauer and Hartmann in a series of articles in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1877(18). In contrast to this, however, is Caro's glib and rhetorical outline of the 'pessimism' of Schopenhauer, Hartmann and Leopardi in 1877-78(19). Caro is heavily indebted to Ribot, but a comparison with the latter reveals the superficiality of his work. His presentation of Schopenhauer and Hartmann is almost caricatural (admittedly, in the case of the latter this is easy to do!); yet the work had a very considerable influence, and a number of highly significant points will emerge from a closer study of it. As for the anthologies of the years 1880-81, which seem to have contributed mightily to the spread of the ideas of Schopenhauer, the emphasis is once again on the moraliste rather than on the metaphysician, whilst Bourdeau's introductions, too, tend to be rather 'debunking'(*).

(*) The table of contents of Bourdeau's 1880 anthology gives a good idea of the content and tenor of both this and successive editions:

"1. Douleurs du Monde.
Douleurs du monde.
Misères de la vie.
Résignation, renoncement, ascétisme et délivrance.
2. L'Amour, les Femmes et le Mariage.
Métaphysique de l'amour. [The longest single section.]
Essai sur les femmes.
3. Pensées diverses.
L'art, le style, la littérature.
Pensées sur la religion.
Pensées sur la politique.
L'homme et la société.

Cont./

In all of these presentations of Schopenhauer, a closer examination reveals however a number of highly significant facts. Turning aside from the more colourful and incisive of the aphorisms, one finds that what Schopenhauer's commentators most emphasize is his 'pessimism' and his 'idealism'. The two are interestingly linked by Remy de Gourmont, speaking of himself and of the whole symbolist generation:

> A vrai dire, notre éducation philosophique [...] avait déjà été faite par le Schopenhauer de M. Burdeau(*) et celui de M. Ribot. Nous avions déjà découvert, et avec quelle ivresse, à la fois que le monde était mauvais et qu'il n'existait que relativement à nous-mêmes.(20)

This 'idealism' (as Gourmont's terms already suggest) is developed by many amongst the symbolists into a doctrine denying the reality of the external world - that is, a form of what has been defined as 'ontological nihilism'; whilst some even go so far as to use the term 'pessimism' to cover this notion also(**). This development, however, is best left

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(*) Is Gourmont referring here to Auguste Burdeau, translator of Le Fondement de la morale (1879) and later of Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation (1888-90), or to J. Bourdeau, editor of the very popular anthologies Pensées, maximes et fragments (1880) and Pensées et fragments (1881)? The remainder of the passage suggests that the period he had in mind here is the early 1880's (when he himself first arrived in Paris), in which case it seems more probable that the reference is to the anthologies of Bourdeau rather than to the densely technical Fondement de la morale. These reminiscences were only written by Gourmont in the early years of the twentieth century; it therefore seems probable that, owing to the later eminence (and even notoriety) of Auguste Burdeau, he is confusing the two men.

(**) Gourmont, in a footnote to the above passage, cites an extract from Le Temps of 7 Nov. 1887, according to which /

Cont. from previous page:

/ L'homme et l'animal.
Caractères des différents peuples."

Later editions of this anthology maintain a similar framework whilst [illegible] adding more material; they do, however, tend to emphasize even further Schopenhauer's views on death and the 'néant' of existence.

for discussion in the following chapter; here we are more concerned with the ambiguities of Schopenhauer's 'pessimism'.

One may take the term pessimism in its normal sense to refer to either a disposition of the mind - a tendency to look at the worst possible aspect of things -, or a metaphysical doctrine, the view - in opposition to Leibnizian optimism - that this world is the worst possible of all worlds, in which 'evil' is everywhere triumphant(*). Schopenhauer certainly is a pessimist in this limited sense (although his views are not - in contrast to those of many of his French exponents - expressed in such crude, simplified terminology), and it is true also that there are many in France who read him only as such. But others use the term pessimism in a sense which extends far beyond the relatively narrow limits of this usage. Broadly

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(*) Cf. the definitions of the O.E.D.:
"1. The worst condition or degree possible or conceivable [...].
2. The tendency or disposition to look at the worst aspect of things; the habit of taking the gloomiest view of circumstances [...].
3. The name given to the doctrine of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and other earlier and later philosophers, that this world is the worst possible, or that everything naturally tends to evil [...]."
In all three senses, the O.E.D. gives as its antithesis 'optimism'.

Schopenhauer's pessimism (in the strict sense) is a closely argued deduction from his theory of the will - a deduction the nature of which few commentators outside of Ribot seem to have fully grasped. For Schopenhauer, life is constant effort and constant need, that is suffering; and suffering (or pain) alone is positive, pleasure being merely a negative phenomenon, a momentary respite from effort, need, suffering. Hartmann, on the other hand, uses a much cruder method to arrive at the same conclusion: by drawing up a balance-sheet of 'les maux' and 'les biens' of existence, he attempts to prove the overwhelming predominance of the former.

Cont. from previous page:
/ "l'éminent M. Caro avait encouragé ses élèves à combattre, lorsque à leur tour ils seraient professeurs, le pessimisme, et surtout les funestes doctrines qui nient la réalité du monde extérieur".

speaking, one may distinguish two main senses in which the term is used in these years.

Firstly, there are those who use the term in a more or less orthodox sense, albeit through a remarkably vague terminology. Brunetière takes up the metaphysical doctrine of Schopenhauer that existence is nought but suffering and sorrow - even taking on, in the eyes of many, the appearance of accredited spokesman for the ideas of 'the sage of Frankfurt'!(21) The symbolist critic Wyzewa, in an article of 1885, takes pessimism initially as a doctrine of 'le mal de vivre'(22). Whilst Caro echoes the same idea when he asks: "Est-il vrai que le monde soit mauvais, qu'il y ait un mal radical, absolu, invincible, dans la nature et dans l'humanité, que l'existence soit un malheur [...]?"(23). Whilst the anthologies of Bourdeau heavily emphasize the more or less 'orthodox' pessimism of Schopenhauer: pleasure is merely a negative phenomenon, pain and suffering alone are positive, man's life is dominated by the fear of death, the anguish of ephemeralness; the world is hell, "la vie de l'homme oscille, comme un pendule, entre la douleur et l'ennui"; the only solution is in a total asceticism and renunciation of life, a life which is otherwise "une nuit que remplit un long rêve, souvent un cauchemar"(24) - an image which Challemel-Lacour had also stressed(25).

But alongside this, there are many for whom 'pessimism' is an expression of the 'absurdity' of the world, that is to say, a form of metaphysical nihilism. Caro clearly has in mind such a meaning when he describes 'optimism' - the antithesis of the pessimism he is discussing - as the doctrine of meaningful universal evolution and necessary progress, a doctrine according to which "il y a un but certain assigné au mouvement de

l'univers", directed by "une raison divine"(26). And it is not merely a few isolated and incoherent thinkers who see this nihilistic view in the 'pessimism' of Schopenhauer and of their own age. Even such a clear and penetrating mind as Ribot uses the term pessimism in a vastly extended sense to include this concept of absurdity; whilst stating that the central question of pessimism is: "Le monde est-il bon ou mauvais?" (and incidentally pointing out that the question should be rather: "La vie est-elle bonne ou mauvaise?"), Ribot also describes the pessimism of Schopenhauer's disciple Julius Bahnsen - "le représentant du pessimisme le plus complet, le plus radical" - as maintaining essentially that "la raison n'a rien à voir dans le monde; il n'y a dans l'univers ni ordre intelligent, ni harmonie, ni plan"(27). Whilst Bourdeau also, though stressing mainly the pessimism properly speaking of Schopenhauer, also makes apparent (perhaps unwittingly) the nihilism of the latter's view of the world: "Si elle n'a pour but immédiat que la douleur, on peut dire que notre existence n'a aucune raison d'être dans le monde"(28). Bourdeau also emphasizes Schopenhauer's critique of all human values, the result of which appears as equally nihilistic: love is an illusion, there is merely a blind, impersonal force working through men and women forcing them to reproduce; life is incessant warfare, an unending armed combat in which egoïsm alone is the motivating force; man is a savage beast ("une bête sauvage"), the State functions principally as "une muselière" (as it had for Hobbes also), and "notre monde civilisé n'est qu'une mascarade"(29).

Do contemporary views of the 'absurdity' of the world derive from Schopenhauer, or is there merely a conjunction

between his thought and certain currents of thought in France in the late nineteenth century? Much has been written about the 'influence' of Schopenhauer in these years; yet, while it is undeniable that Schopenhauer contributed to the spread of such ideas as the above, their source is to be sought rather in developments in France itself. More generally, the vogue of Schopenhauer in these years appears to be at least as much a symptom as a cause; Pellissier is probably close to the truth when he writes: "La philosophie de Schopenhauer ne nous était connue, il y a quelques années encore, que par d'humoristiques boutades. Mais toute une partie de notre jeunesse, et l'élite même, la portait déjà, comme innée, dans son coeur et dans sa tête."(30) That is to say, the philosophy of Schopenhauer appeared to <u>confirm</u> certain major tendencies or developments of contemporary thought. A detailed analysis of this will go a long way towards explaining the appeal of Schopenhauer to many French intellectuals - in particular, young intellectuals - in the years between 1870 and 1900, as well as leading us to a consideration of the chief conclusions being deduced from Schopenhauer in France at this time.

There are, of course, the various more superficial reasons for Schopenhauer's appeal. Many French writers insist upon his clarity, as compared with the fog of other German metaphysicians (Kant, and particularly Hegel) - a quality which, they never tire of pointing out, Schopenhauer derived from the <u>philosophes</u> and moralists of the French eighteenth century(31). Thus an element of chauvinism again influences the intellectual debate. There were also many who seized upon the misogyny of Schopenhauer as confirming their own disillusioned views upon the subject;

it is no accident that Schopenhauer's views on women, love and marriage occupy a prominent place in the anthologies(32). Many also seized upon his anti-German and anti-patriotic sentiments, pleasing to a nation which had recently suffered defeat in war at German hands (Ribot cites his definition of patriotism as "la plus sotte des passions et la passion des sots"(33)). His contempt for politics - stressed by Challemel-Lacour, Ribot and the anthologies(34) -, and his aristocratic contempt for "la canaille" (the source of his belief that philosophy was the property of an intellectual élite alone, whilst religions existed to cater for the vulgar masses), were considered with sympathy by a generations of writers and intellectuals who saw themselves as an élite estranged from any active political life. Whilst Schopenhauer's aesthetics provided a theoretical justification for a withdrawal from political and social involvement into a mystical realm of 'art'. Others again - fervent Wagnerians all - claimed to find the way to Schopenhauer through Wagner, and to see Wagner as a major agent in the introduction of a new wave of pessimism into France(35).

Alongside this may be the fact, as some allege, that the pessimism (in the strict sense) of Schopenhauer found a sympathetic reception amongst the gloom that followed defeat in war followed by the spectacle of civil war(36). More important, however, is probably the fact that Schopenhauer benefited from the general importation of German thought into France after 1870. After the defeat of 1870-71, two schools of thought concerning the value of German culture confronted each other in France: whilst some (amongst them Emile Montégut, Nisard, Fustel de Coulanges) argued that France should turn

away from all German ideas and influences to an immersion in national traditions, others (such as Renan in La Réforme intellectuelle et morale) saw the reason for Germany's victory in the superior development of its science - thus, in order to reach the same level of development, France must look to the sources of this German superiority. It was this latter way of thinking that won the day, and the flood-gates were opened to a new influx of German thought and influence, not only scientific but philosophical also(37). After Kant, Schopenhauer became the German philosopher whose influence - or at least prestige - in France was greatest after 1870.

There were also more serious and more philosophical reasons for this popularity. To begin with, the would-be empiricism of Schopenhauer struck a sympathetic chord in an age familiar with the demands of positivistic science. Schopenhauer claims to take as the starting-point of his philosophy man's experience of the world and of himself; he insists that he is not interested in trying to explain whence the world came or whither it is going, but merely what it is(*). The empiricism of this starting-point was vaguely realised by Challemel-Lacour, who likened it to that of positivism. Ribot

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(*) Cf. Book IV of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, para.53: "Philosophy can never do more than interpret and explain what is given. It can only bring to distinct abstract knowledge of the reason the nature of the world which in the concrete, that is, as feeling, expresses itself comprehensibly to every one.[...] This actual world of experience, in which we are, and which is in us, remains both the material and the limits of our consideration." He states also that his method and the true philosophical approach to the world is "that method which does not concern itself with the whence, the whither, and the why of the world, but always and everywhere demands only the what". (The World as Will and Idea, tr. J. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, London, 1906, vol. I, pp. 350-3.)

stresses the empiricism of Schopenhauer in his theory of the will; this will is first and foremost an object of immediate experience - in the words of Schopenhauer which he quotes: "La seule connaissance immédiate que nous ayons est celle de notre Volonté. C'est le datum qui peut nous servir de clef pour tout le reste."(38) And he too emphasizes Schopenhauer's claim to be concerned only with the phenomena of the world and the relationships between them - a claim which he sees as bearing a striking similarity to the claims of positivistic science. Whilst Brunetière claims that what he likes most of all in Schopenhauer's philosophy is its empirical nature - "ce qu'il [Schopenhauer] appelait lui-même le caractère expérimental", as compared with the "magnifiques palais d'idées" of "l'ancienne métaphysique" (in particular, he draws a contrast with the wild fancies of Hegel)(39). Schopenhauer starts off from a basis of 'scientific' observation and concrete fact, working empirically, like the scientist - and Brunetière makes an explicit comparison with the methods of Darwin: "Sa méthode est déjà celle de Darwin, et le second volume au moins du Monde comme volonté et comme représentation ressemble, sous ce rapport, à la Descendance de l'homme ou à l'Origine des espèces"(40). Many others echo a similar appreciation.

But alongside this question of methodology, the vogue of Schopenhauer owes perhaps most of all to the fact that, to an age which could not escape an awareness of contemporary scientific developments, his philosophy appeared to confirm certain of the major conclusions of modern science, whilst providing the appearance of philosophical respectability for those conclusions (and also, for some, providing a consolation from the harshness of those conclusions, and an imagined form

of escape).

This is so first of all in the field of physics. Here it is of great interest to find that many thinkers equate Schopenhauer's metaphysical 'Will' with the 'force' of contemporary physics. Thus Ribot, explaining Schopenhauer's special use of the term 'Will':

> Schopenhauer prend le mot Volonté dans un sens qui lui est propre et qu'on peut traduire sans trop d'inexactitude par le mot force. On entend d'ordinaire par Volonté l'acte conscient d'un être intelligent; tandis que pour Schopenhauer la Volonté est inconsciente par essence, conscient par accident.(41)

Brunetière confirms this identification: "Ce qu'il [Schopenhauer] appelle Volonté, l'usage, entre les philosophes, est en effet de le nommer Force"(42). Whilst Pellissier sees one of the causes of contemporary 'pessimism' in the doctrine of universal determinism; modern science reduces us, he maintains, to "la conception d'un monde gouverné par des forces inconscientes, d'une humanité régie par des instincts aveugles"(43) - a conception which, in the form of a universe governed by blind, unconscious Will and of mankind driven by the same blind Will in the form of instinct, is also that of Schopenhauer.

Secondly, certain features of Schopenhauer's analysis of the will as a psychological phenomenon seemed to confirm a number of conclusions of contemporary psychology and brain-physiology(*). This in part explains the interest in Schopenhauer of men like Ribot (author of a large number of works on

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(*) The impulse given to the development of psychology in France in the second half of the nineteenth century was itself in part a result of growing scepticism concerning all metaphysical systems. Where metaphysics fell into disfavour, psychology benefited. The second half of the century saw particularly the development of physiological psychology (or 'psycho-physiology' as it was called), with a solid foundation in anatomy and the study of the brain and central nervous system.

psychology and 'psycho-pathology' and founder-director of the Revue philosophique(*)) and Paul Janet, and the latter's interest in Hartmann, whose philosophy of the 'Unconscious' derives originally from Schopenhauer(44). This question, however, is best left for discussion in the following chapter.

Above all, the account of the world given by Schopenhauer appeared to agree with and to confirm that being deduced by many men from the theories of Darwin. Brunetière places the two men together when he claims that Schopenhauer is, with Darwin, "l'homme dont les idées auront exercé sur cette fin de siècle la plus profonde influence"(45). Whilst it is striking to find, in Pellissier's essay on Schopenhauer and pessimism, that, although the name of Darwin is not once mentioned, the impact of Darwinian ideas is everywhere apparent; much of what is attributed to Schopenhauer, in face, can be equally well attributed to Darwin.

First of all, both Schopenhauer and Darwin see life essentially in terms of a struggle for existence(**). "Il faut lutter pour vivre, et la lutte pour la vie, qui est la vie même, détruit toute justice et toute vertu" - this is not Darwin, nor a deduction from Darwin, but Schopenhauer as cited by Pellissier(46). According to Schopenhauer, life is "une lutte pour l'existence avec la certitude d'être vaincu",

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(*) Théodule Ribot (1839-1916) was the virtual founder in France of experimental psychology as an independent science. He argued that psychology should be studied objectively, in the manner of the natural sciences, and divorced from all metaphysical concerns (e.g. the nature of the 'soul'). He was greatly influenced by the English empirical school, and helped to introduce the ideas of the latter into France (La Psychologie anglaise contemporaine, 1870) as well as German psychological thought. With Taine, he was the most influential psychological thinker of his time.

(**) A third nineteenth-century thinker of major importance also saw life essentially in terms of struggle, though this time of class struggle: Karl Marx.

a view which confirms Darwin's premise while adding a pessimistic twist of its own; this phrase is cited by Ribot, Caro and Pellissier, all of whom are clearly struck by it(47); whilst even Challemel-Lacour had seen that, for Schopenhauer, life was "concurrence et destruction". Elsewhere, Pellissier, to the question "Qu'est-ce que la vie humaine?", replies with a fusion of Darwin and Schopenhauer: "une vaste mêlée dans laquelle les hommes se pressent et se heurtent, ayant leur intérêt pour unique règle.[...] l'univers tout entier nous apparaît comme un immense champ de bataille"; behind all our pretences of altruism lies (as Schopenhauer attempts to demonstrate) "[le] plus pitoyable égoïsme"(48). Even Brunetière stresses Schopenhauer's view of life as a struggle for survival, for self-preservation, quoting a passage in which the German philosopher argues that the function of the brain in all creatures is to provide "l'intelligence nécessaire à sa conservation"(49).

Secondly, just as Darwin's theories ultimately produce or help to produce a crisis in the concept of 'Nature' - or rather, a crisis in ethical thought based upon Nature -, the philosophy of Schopenhauer represents, some forty or fifty years earlier, the first major expression of this crisis. Nature is no longer 'good', but indifferent and amoral. The idea seems banal to us today, and may well even provoke a wry smile; yet it was sufficiently novel in the second half of the nineteenth century for writers to insist upon it time and time again even as late as 1890(*). Schopenhauer, in fact, in reaction against existing

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(*)Cf. Pellissier, who even goes so far as to accuse nature, not only of indifference, but also of 'immorality': "Non seulement la nature est insensible à nos souffrances, sourde à nos angoisses, muette à nos questions, mais encore, ne faisant aucune distinction entre le bien et le mal, elle tient école d'immoralité.[...] la nature ne connaît pas ce qui est juste, et toute sa morale, si elle en avait une, consisterait à justifier la force, dont elle étale les triomphes avec une sereine impudeur [sic]." (Essais de littérature contemporaine, pp.14-15).

views and in particular against Leibnizian optimism, tends to go to the opposite extreme and to take an almost demonic view of nature; he speaks at times as if his 'Génie de l'espèce', this 'génie malin', were more than a metaphor, and as if the world were governed by a cruel and malicious deity; and it is this which causes him to describe the world as 'evil'. This 'machiavélisme de la Nature' is seized upon and emphasized by detractors such as Caro; but the real contention of Schopenhauer is the blind indifference of nature (or the universe) to man, and this is brought out by Ribot, citing Schopenhauer:

> La nature - qui est la volonté objectivée - ne connaît que ce qui est physique, non ce qui est moral.
>
> Ce qui règne dans la nature, c'est la force et non le droit, dans le monde de l'homme comme dans le règne animal.
>
> Cette volonté aveugle (blind), inconsciente (unbewusst), est l'antipode d'un principe moral; elle ne peut être que la force.(50)

Moreover, if one takes the concept of Nature in the widest sense, to include the category of existence itself, then it is clear that Schopenhauer represents a crisis in philosophical thought of still greater magnitude. In his philosophy, existence itself is called into question and declared undesirable, and a closely reasoned argument put forward to support the view; non-being is declared preferable to being. The eighteenth century had called into question particular codes of values (usually Christian), but such a negation of the value of existence itself was foreign to its optimistic, forward-looking mentality(*); and the same is true for the most part

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(*) A spokesman for a Schopenhauerian viewpoint might be found in Goethe's Mephistopheles, when he defines himself in Faust, Part I:"Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!
Und das mit Recht; denn alles, was entsteht,
Ist wert, dass es zugrunde geht;
Drum besser wär's, wenn nichts entstünde." Cont./

of the nineteenth century. But Schopenhauer and, following him, Hartmann preach the eventual annihilation of all life (or at least human life). Seen in this light, even their pessimism (in the strict sense) takes on a new significance: the initial premise (life is nothing but struggle, suffering, and unending misery) may be merely pessimistic, but the ultimate conclusion is one of what might be called integral nihilism(*). Thus while some, such as Brunetière, claim to find in pessimism a source of moral strength (and, in the case of Brunetière, harness this pessimism to political and social reaction), others follow Schopenhauer and Hartmann, on a theoretical plane at least, to the same nihilistic conclusion. Images of the extinction of eventual annihilation of the human race become frequent in the literature of the late nineteenth century, to be found, for example, in the work of Jean Lahor, of the young Laforgue, and in the Schopenhauerian and 'decadent' novel of Edouard Rod, La Course à la mort (1885).

Finally, Schopenhauer's vision of the universe as dominated

(*) One of the many theoretical German works on nihilism makes a distinction between a nihilistic premise (Voraussetzung) and a nihilistic consequence (Folgerung) defined respectively, in the best German manner, as "der Glaube und die Erkenntnis, dass hinter allen Glaubensinhalten, Erkenntnisinhalten und Werten nichts steckt", and "der Wille, alle Glaubensinhalte, Erkenntnisinhalte und Werte auf dieses Nichts zurückzuführen" (H. LEVIN-GOLDSCHMIDT, Der Nihilismus im Licht einer kritischen Philosophie, Zürich, 1941, p. 17). Despite the pomposity of the terms, the distinction has some relevance here.

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/ But most of the time, Mephisto himself does not act in accordance with this self-definition, and, although Goethe himself was not guilty of the shallowness of certain thinkers of the Enlightenment, this is certainly not his own final viewpoint in Faust.

by blind Will, by ceaseless activity without any goal, confirms the picture, to which Darwinism had more than any other single cause contributed, of an 'absurd' universe(*). It is this concept of an unconscious, blind force at the centre of things which was Schopenhauer's 'one thought' ("pensée unique"), the point of departure of his whole philosophy; and it is this also which is the single most significant feature of his philosophy. In an age when belief in a rational, ordered, meaningful universe was almost universal, Schopenhauer's view makes him a stranger to his time. It is no accident that his rise to fame in Germany begins with the defeat of the liberal opposition in 1848-49 and with it, both symbolically and psychologically, of Hegelianism, and that this rise subsequently parallels the decline in the fortunes of Hegel. His opposition to Hegel was not just a case of personal envy or pettiness (although there was plenty of that involved); the starting-point of his whole philosophy is diametrically opposed to the rational starting-point of Hegel. The conceptions of his contemporaries of a teleological universal process, their philosophies of history and of Becoming, are totally lacking in Schopenhauer and are ardently combatted by him; any justification for either the past, present or future of the world is absent in his philosophy. The world is, in the strict philosophical sense, absurd (Schopenhauer's term is grundlos); as the French translation of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung puts it:

(*) Schopenhauer believed that he had settled the debate between mechanism and finality by positing an 'immanent finality' in nature - Will, the cause of all things, driving all things in the universe from within. But this does not alter the fact that this Will is an unconscious, blind force, and the universe consequently an 'absurd' universe.

> Si [...] un homme ose soulever cette question: "Pourquoi le néant n'est-il pas plutôt que ce monde?", le monde ne se peut justifier de lui-même, il ne peut trouver en lui-même aucune raison, aucune cause finale de son existence, il ne peut démontrer qu'il existe en vue de lui-même, c'est-à-dire pour son propre avantage. Dans ma théorie la véritable explication est que la source de son existence est formellement sans raison: elle consiste, en effet, dans un vouloir-vivre aveugle. (51)

That this view of an absurd, irrational universe in Schopenhauer's philosophy was noticed in France in the late nineteenth century is beyond doubt, even though its full significance was not always realised. Challemel-Lacour notices Schopenhauer's contempt for history and philosophies of history, though without realising the reason behind this; but even he touches several times, at least implicitly, on the German philosopher's conception of 'absurdity' (for instance, he stresses that Schopenhauer's Will is a "volonté aveugle"). Paul Janet sees in Schopenhauer "un athée qui croit [...] au néant du monde"(52), a concept which, for him, entails a belief in the 'absurdity' of the world. Caro sees in the pessimism of Schopenhauer's disciple Bahnsen a denial of any finality in nature, referring to the "principe irrationel d'où il [pessimism] dérive"(53). Whilst Ribot, though not referring explicitly to this 'absurdity', does stress very strongly, as Schopenhauer had himself done, that his cosmic Will is a <u>blind</u> force:

> La thèse de Schopenhauer se tient logiquement. La volonté, il le répète à chaque instant, est dans son fond, besoin aveugle de vivre (<u>blind Drang zum Leben</u>) [...].(54)

> La volonté [...] a une tendance aveugle à vivre, à produire, à perpétuer la vie. L'expression permanente de cette tendance aveugle, c'est l'espèce [...]. Chaque espèce exprime partiellement, à sa manière, cet effort éternel du principe aveugle qui <u>veut vivre</u>.(55)

In Schopenhauer's view, says Ribot, life is the result of a

mere accident. And both Ribot and Pellissier join to cite Schopenhauer's description of the absurdity of human life and history:

> Vouloir sans motif, toujours souffrir, toujours lutter, puis mourir, et ainsi de suite dans les siècles des siècles, jusqu'à ce que notre planète s'écaille en petits morceaux, voilà toute l'histoire de l'humanité. (56)

At this point one can grasp the full significance of Caro's final sweeping characterisation of contemporary 'pessimism' as

> le dernier terme d'un mouvement philosophique qui a tout détruit: la réalité de Dieu, la réalité du devoir, la réalité du moi, la moralité de la science, le progrès, et par là l'effort, le travail, dont cette philosophie proclame l'absolue inutilité.(57)

The consequences of all this are far-reaching. According to Nietzsche, the real achievement of Schopenhauer was to have dethroned rationalism as an interpretation of man and the universe. This is certainly true, but it must be pointed out that the consequent 'irrationalism' of Schopenhauer, along with that derived from his philosophy, is a complex phenomenon, having several different fields of application.

Firstly, as has been seen, by helping to destroy existing 'rational' conceptions of the universe the philosophy of Schopenhauer encourages the development of the view of an 'absurd' (or 'irrational' - though strictly speaking the term should be 'non-rational') universe, in which nothing - or everything - is justified. The extent and importance of this development will emerge in the second part of this thesis.

Secondly, a further development of irrationalism is brought about by the linking of the growing belief (discussed in the preceding chapter) that the progress of knowledge has led only to disillusionment and ultimately to intellectual and spiritual bankruptcy (thus 'knowledge' equals 'tristesse'), with

Schopenhauer's equation of intelligence and suffering. According to Schopenhauer, the greater the degree of intelligence (and sensibility) in a creature, the greater the degree of or capacity for suffering. This equation had first been realised by Challemel-Lacour, and later exponents of Schopenhauer do not fail to stress it; thus Pellissier emphasizes that man's intellect (intelligence) "fait de lui le plus malheureux de tous les êtres", and that "le pouvoir et l'intelligence de l'homme ne s'accroissent qu'en accroissant sa misère. Au développement de notre cerveau se mesure notre capacité de souffrir."(58). The linking of the two ideas gives rise to a wave of anti-intellectualism in France, a protest against 'reason', 'thought' and the 'intellect' in man all together, all three terms being equated. A typical example can be seen in the passionate invective against 'thought' in the concluding lines of Gourmont's Les Chevaux de Diomède (1897) by the hero, Diomède, who sees thought as the root of all evil:

> Le mal, c'est la pensée déformatrice avec toutes ses tentations, ses labyrinthes d'où nul n'est ressorti, sinon estropié par les luttes, enfiévré par les angoisses intellectuelles.[...] Sois maudite, Pensée, créatrice de tout, mais créatrice meurtrière, mère maladroite qui n'a jamais mis au monde que des êtres dont les épaules sont l'escabeau du hasard et les yeux, la risée de la vie.(59)

Finally, the irrationalism of Schopenhauer consists in a displacement of 'reason' or 'intellect' from its former dominant position in man's psychological make-up. This fact is seized upon not only by neo-Catholics (such as Brunetière) and by theoreticians of nationalism (such as Barrès), but by the chief theoreticians of the whole symbolist movement. Moreover, the latter follow through the idea in a way in which the Catholics and Brunetière could not. Schopenhauer's

conception of the place of reason or the intellect is in fact much more precise than a mere downgrading of the latter; it concerns also the latter's relation to the will. For Schopenhauer, far from commanding the will in man, the intellect is radically inferior to the will and a mere instrument of it. Challemel-Lacour had first been struck by the "petitesse de l'intelligence" in Schopenhauer's theory, but it was Ribot who most clearly expounded the latter's view, quoting his image: "L'intelligence est l'instrument [redacted] de la volonté, comme le marteau est celui du forgeron"(60). Thus - by deduction - knowledge and truth itself are determined not by reason or the intellect, but by the will in man. It is this deduction which many amongst the symbolists made, and which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter IV: REFERENCES.

(1) PELLISSIER, Essais de littérature contemporaine, p. 1.

(2) Téodor de WYZEWA, 'Le Pessimisme de Richard Wagner', Revue Wagnérienne, July 1885. Reprinted in Nos Maîtres, Paris, 1895, p. 3.

(3) Paul JANET, 'Un Philosophe misanthrope', Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 May 1877, p. 272.

(4) J. BOURDEAU, 'Le Bonheur dans le pessimisme. Schopenhauer d'après sa correspondance', R.D.M., 15 Aug. 1884, p.918.

(5) Remy de GOURMONT, Promenades littéraires, Mercure de France, 1963, p. 183, tome III.

(6) Edouard ROD, Les Idées morales du temps présent, Paris, Perrin, 1891, p. 44.

(7) For example, Charles BARTHOLMÈSS in 1855 devoted a chapter of his Histoire critique des doctrines religieuses de la philosophie moderne to 'Les adversaires de Hegel: Herbart et Schopenhauer'. In August, 1856, Saint-René TAILLANDIER briefly discussed Schopenhauer in an article in the R.D.M. on 'L'Allemagne littéraire'. In Dec., 1856, A. WEILL discussed 'Arthur Schopenhauer, la philosophie de la magie' in the Revue française, and in the following year published in translation extracts from Le Fondement de la morale. In Dec., 1858, the Revue contemporaine published an article on Schopenhauer and Leopardi, while in Nov., 1859, Charles DOLFUS published in the Revue germanique an article entitled 'Arthur Schopenhauer et sa philosophie'.

(8) Examples from these years include: In Jan., 1859, Jan., 1860 and April and June 1861, the Revue germanique published translations of extracts of Schopenhauer's Parerga et Paralipomena, and ~~xx~~ La Métaphysique de l'amour and La Métaphysique de la mort. In 1862 FOUCHER DE CAREIL published a volume entitled Hegel et Schopenhauer, and in the same year the review Europa devoted one of its numbers to Schopenhauer. In 1863 a certain G. de SPIEGEL published L'Esprit de la philosophie de Schopenhauer at Darmstadt (followed in 1885 by a volume of Suppléments to the latter). Other scattered publications continued throughout the 1860's, but none of these or of the above publications reached a wide public.

(9) P. CHALLEMEL-LACOUR, 'Un Bouddhiste contemporain en Allemagne: Arthur Schopenhauer', R.D.M., 15 March 1870, pp. 296-332.

(10) Théodule RIBOT, La Philosophie de Schopenhauer, Paris, 1874; 2e éd., 1885. By 1906 the work had reached its 10th edition.

(11) After 1874, numerous books and articles refer to Ribot's work, almost invariably to praise it highly and to recommend it, and many of these books and articles draw heavily upon the work. Charles LÉVÊQUE, in an article on 'L'Esthétique de Schopenhauer' in the Journal des Savants for Dec. 1874, while referring to the earlier book by Foucher de Careil and the article of Challemel-Lacour, sees Ribot's work as the first attempt at a proper exposition of the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Bourdeau, in his introduction to Pensées, maximes et fragments (1880), recommends to the reader the volume of Caro and especially the "petit livre très intéressant et si complet de M. Ribot". References to Ribot's work - and to their debt to it - are also frequent amongst the symbolists.

(12) Eduard von HARTMANN, 'Schopenhauer et son disciple Frauenstaedt', Revue philosophique, May-June 1876 and July 1876; 'Un nouveau disciple de Schopenhauer: J. Bahnsen', Revue philos., Jan. 1877 and Feb. 1877.

(13) La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, tr. B. Nolen, Paris, Germer Baillière, 2 vol., 1877.

(14) This confusion is perpetrated most notably by CARO, Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle. But the vast majority of those who talk of 'pessimism' make the same confusion.

(15) Cf. SAINT-RENÉ TAILLANDIER in his article in the R.D.M. of 1856. The same point is stressed by Challemel-Lacour.

(16) 'Un Bouddhiste contemporain en Allemagne: Arthur Schopenhauer', R.D.M., 15 March 1870, p. 328.

(17) Cf. ibid., pp. 297, 306, 330.

(18) Paul JANET, 'Un philosophe misanthrope', R.D.M., 15 April 1877; 'La Philosophie de la volonté', R.D.M., 15 May 1877; 'La Philosophie de l'Inconscient', R.D.M., 1 June 1877.

(19) Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle. Leopardi - Schopenhauer-Hartmann.

(20) Promenades littéraires, Paris, Mercure de France, 1963, tome III, p. 183.

(21) Cf. D. BOURCHENIN, La Trace du pessimisme dans la société et les lettres françaises contemporaines, Paris, Grassart, 1892, p. 26.

(22) 'Le Pessimisme de Richard Wagner', Revue Wagnérienne, July 1885. Repr. in Nos Maîtres, Paris, 1895.

(23) CARO, Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle, p. i.

(24) SCHOPENHAUER, Pensées, maximes et fragments, ed. J. Bourdeau, Paris, 1880, p. 65.

(25) CHALLEMEL-LACOUR, art. cit., p. 332.

(26) CARO, Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle, p. 85.

(27) RIBOT, review of J. SULLY, Pessimism, a History and a Criticism (London, 1877), in Revue philos., Sept., 1877, pp. 335-6.

(28) Pensées, maximes et fragments, 1880, p. 29.

(29) Pensées et fragments, 1881, 'Pensées diverses'.

(30) PELLISSIER, Essais de littérature contemporaine, p. 9.

(31) Cf. for example CHALLEMEL-LACOUR, art. cit., pp. 299, 326; and Paul JANET, 'Un philosophe misanthrope', R.D.M., 15 ~~May~~ April 1877. Ribot too also stresses this point.

(32) In the 1880 volume, the section on 'L'Amour, les femmes et le mariage' occupies 65 pages out of the 167 pages of the work. Caro also emphasizes Schopenhauer's views concerning the 'Génie de l'espèce'.

(33) La Philosophie de Schopenhauer, p. 14. Cf. also CHALLEMEL-LACOUR, art. cit., pp. 299, 300.

(34) Ribot sees in Schopenhauer's "négation absolue de toute vie politique" a consequence of his "morale bouddhiste" op. cit., p. 18). Cf. also CHALLEMEL-LACOUR, art. cit., p. 299, and the sections containing Schopenhauer's thoughts on politics in the anthologies.

(35) For Wyzewa, "l'oeuvre de Wagner est une scolie de Schopenhauer" (art. cit., p. 5). Edouard Dujardin claims that most of the symbolists were led to and saw Schopenhauer through Wagner (Mallarmé par un des siens, Paris, Messein, 1936, p. 94).

(36) Cf. PELLISSIER, [redacted]. cit., p. 10.

(37) Cf. Claude DIGEON, La Crise allemande de la pensée française (1870-1914), Paris, P.U.F., 1959; Jean-Marie CARRÉ, Les Ecrivains français et le mirage allemand, 1800-1914, Paris, Boivin, 1947.

(38) RIBOT, op. cit., p. 67.

(39) BRUNETIÈRE, 'La Philosophie de Schopenhauer', in Questions de critique, Paris, 1889 (the essay in question is dated 1886), pp. 141-3.

(40) ibid., p. 143.

(41) RIBOT, op. cit., p. 67.

(42) BRUNETIÈRE, 'La Philosophie de Schopenhauer', pp. 147-8.

(43) PELLISSIER, [redacted]. cit., pp. 12-13, 17.

(44) Cf. JANET's articles on 'La Philosophie de l'Inconscient', R.D.M., 1 June 1877, and 'Schopenhauer et la physiologie française', R.D.M., 1 May 1880.

(45) 'La Philosophie de Schopenhauer', Questions de critique, p. 139.

(46) PELLISSIER, art. cit., p. 17.

(47) RIBOT, op. cit., p. 139; CARO, op. cit., p. 120; PELLISSIER, art. cit., p. 6.

(48) PELLISSIER, art. cit., p. 16.

(49) BRUNETIÈRE, art. cit., p. 149.

(50) RIBOT, op. cit., p. 152.

(51) Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation, tr. A. Burdeau, Paris, P.U.F., 1966, p. 1342. Cited by Clément ROSSET, Schopenhauer, philosophe de l'absurde, Paris, P.U.F., 1967, p. 78.

(52) JANET, 'La Philosophie de la volonté', R.D.M., 1 May 1877, p. 618.

(53) CARO, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

(54) RIBOT, op. cit., pp. 152 ff.

(55) ibid., p. 127.

(56) ibid., p. 141, and PELLISSIER, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

(57) CARO, op. cit., p. 292.

(58) PELLISSIER, op. cit., pp. 6, 7.

(59) GOURMONT, Les Chevaux de Diomède, Paris, Mercure de France, 7e éd., s.d., p. 249.

(60) RIBOT, op. cit., p. 71.

Chapter V: SCHOPENHAUER AND SYMBOLIST IDEALISM.

It is a well-known fact that behind the symbolist movement in literature lies a series of philosophical developments collectively known as the 'idealist reaction' or 'idealist revival' of the late nineteenth century. The importance of these developments was recognized and stressed, sometimes vehemently, by numerous writers belonging to the symbolist movement. Remy de Gourmont, for example, claimed in the early 1890's:

> A cette heure, la théorie idéaliste n'est plus guère contestée que par quelques canards enclins à se plaire dans les vieux marécages.(1)

Whilst according to Henri de Régnier,"Cet idéalisme est la clé métaphysique de la plupart des esprits de la génération qui compose l'école symboliste"(2).

Much has been written about this 'idealist reaction' or 'revival', and it is certainly not intended in this chapter to deny either its reality or its importance. It was a movement with a strong philosophical basis, affecting many fields of thought, from contemporary psychology to the Catholic religious revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it is at the same time an extremely complex and frequently confused phenomenon, the terms 'idealism' and 'the ideal' often being used, especially by non-philosophers but sometimes even by professional philosophers, to cover a wide range of differing ideas and doctrines. As typifying this confusion we may take two enthusiastic spokesmen for and advocates of the movement, the one a non-philosopher (though with pretensions to being one) - once again, Brunetière -, and the other a philosopher and

author of numerous philosophical works, Alfred Fouillée.

It was in a series of articles and addresses dating from the mid-1890's onwards that Brunetière took up the torch of 'idealism'. "Depuis une quinzaine d'années", he maintains in 1896, the general attitude towards 'science' has changed markedly; and this change has brought in its train a 'rebirth' of idealism (he even goes so far as to proclaim "la revanche de l'idéalisme, et la victoire des métaphysiciens")(3). Elsewhere, it is the decline of the doctrine of 'positivism', according to Brunetière, which has ushered in this 'renaissance' of idealism. His definition of this idealism, however, is vague, avowedly so; he states in his lecture on 'La Renaissance de l'Idéalisme':

> Vous entendez bien que je ne prends pas ici ce mot Idéalisme dans le sens précis, technique et limitatif que lui donnent les philosophes. S'il y a des définitions qui ne sauraient être trop strictes, il y en a d'autres dont il est bon, nécessaire même, de laisser un peu flotter les termes.(4)

Nevertheless, he does go on to give a threefold definition of this idealism as the belief, firstly, that the sum total of the facts of existence - "événements de l'histoire, ou phénomènes de la nature" - "ne portent pas en eux leur signification tout entière; et qu'ils relèvent de quelque chose d'ultérieur, de supérieur et d'antérieur à eux-mêmes"; secondly, that rational or empirical knowledge is not the only type of knowledge that we can have, but that there exist other realities beyond the reach of the senses; and thirdly, that behind the events of history and the phenomena of nature "une cause invisible, un mystérieux auteur se cache, - Deus absconditus, - qui en a réglé d'avance la succession et les péripéties"(5).

So far, this is fairly consistent. This idealism is the exact opposite of a simplified materialism -or, as Brunetière chooses to call it here, of 'positivism', contemptuously dismissed as "une doctrine qui affectait les allures d'une religion de la matière"(6). It is a form of spiritualism, the belief that behind material phenomena there lies a fourth dimension, so to speak, a spiritual reality of some kind - which Brunetière ultimately identifies with the God of Christianity. But Brunetière then goes on to confuse the issue. Looking to the professional philosophers for support, he cites a definition of 'idealism' which maintains that the only 'realities' in the universe are the thoughts of each individual mind!(*) Whilst when he goes on to give examples of this 'renaissance de l'idéalisme' in the sciences themselves, in literature and the arts, and in politics, we find that this 'idealism' consists merely of the belief in or illustration of some idea, or at most of some ideal, in a strictly everyday (and non-metaphysical) sense. Thus, says Brunetière, the real starting-point of the scientist is, in practice, not a set of facts to be explained, but an idea in the scientist's mind - a hypothesis to be proved. Whilst in painting the rebirth of idealism is shown in the work of the greatest contemporary painter, Puvis de Chavannes, whose canvasses contain 'philos-

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(*) "Le réel prétendu devient pour lui [the mind] signe et symbole; et ce sont désormais ses pensées, avec leurs lois inflexibles, leur inépuisable variété de formes et de contours, qu'il estime seules de véritables existences." Cited from Georges Lyon, L'Idéalisme en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle, in 'La Renaissance de l'Idéalisme', Discours de combat, tome I, Paris, 1902, note to p.8. (Words underlined in italics in the text.)

ophy': "Avez-vous en effet remarqué, Messieurs, que presque toutes ses grandes oeuvres sont des allégories?"[sic]. Most instructive of all is Brunetière's attack upon literary 'naturalism' and above all upon Zola. This naturalism (along with the allied doctrine of realism) is the expression in literature of the doctrine of 'positivism', that vulgar 'religion of matter'; and as its exact opposite, Brunetière cites the later plays of Dumas fils. Dumas

> a voulu qu'après avoir diverti son oeuvre fît penser; et il a voulu enfin subordonner les moyens propres de son art à une idée dont ils ne fussent que l'expression. C'est justement ce que j'appelle de l'Idéalisme, conformément à la définition que j'en ai posée dans la présente conférence.(7)

How blind does one need to be not to see the same concerns in the work of Zola, to say nothing of Flaubert (who is also set upon by Brunetière)?(*)

The issue is even further complicated by the philosopher Fouillée, speaking of 'le mouvement idéaliste en France'(8).

(*) Such attacks upon Zola and naturalism are frequent also amongst the writers of the symbolist movement. But amongst these, Remy de Gourmont at least is sufficiently astute - or fair-minded - to distinguish between theory and practice in Zola: "Nous eûmes, en ces dernières années, un essai très sérieux de littérature basée sur le mépris de l'idée et le dédain du symbole. On en connaît la théorie, qui semble culinaire: Prenez une tranche de vie, etc. M. Zola, ayant inventé la recette, oublia de s'en servir. Ses "tranches de vie" sont de lourds poèmes d'un lyrisme fangeux et tumultueux, romantisme populaire, symbolisme démocratique, mais toujours pleins d'une idée, toujours gros d'une signification allégorique, Germinal, la Mine, la Foule, la Grève." (Preface to Le Livre des Masques, 1896).

Gourmont's attack upon Zola also reveals, incidentally, some of the political reasons behind it (his opposition to Zola's "romantisme populaire", "symbolisme démocratique", etc.). Similarly, Brunetière's real reason for attacking Zola with such violence is of course political. Behind his attacks lie his growing hostility to the institutions of the Third Republic (of which Zola had declared that "la République sera naturaliste ou elle ne sera pas"), and above all his growing fear of the rising socialist movement. The whole of the French Right, in fact, joins in the same chorus, Bourget - and Maurras - at their head.

He takes 'idealism' initially neither in Brunetière's sense of spiritualism, nor as a "théorie qui veut tout réduire à des idées, tout au moins à de la pensée", nor as "la représentation purement intellectualiste du monde", but to refer to any doctrine which (in the manner of Bergson) starts off from "le fait psychique de l'expérience, en sa réalité immédiate et concrète [...]; le point de départ doit être le fait d'expérience interne". This, he maintains, is the 'idealism' of contemporary philosophers, which ought rather to be called "le 'psychisme'". But then Fouillée goes on to cite as examples of 'idealism' "les préoccupations morales et même religieuses" which writers such as Bourget and Rod have introduced into the novel, the "religion de la souffrance humaine" propounded by de Vogüé, the defence of "[les] plus hautes doctrines morales et sociales" by Jules Lemaître and Emile Faguet, and Paul Desjardins' "Union pour l'action morale'[sic]!(9)

Yet these discussions by Brunetière and Fouillée, far from being exceptional, are on the contrary typical in their confusion surrounding the term idealism. At best, much of what passes for idealism, and much of what lies behind the unending talk of 'l'Idéal', during the symbolist era and amongst symbolist writers - in supposed opposition to 'realism' and above all 'naturalism' - is merely literature concerned with the illustration of some idea; at worst, it is simply the defence, by conservative and right-thinking writers, critics and philosophers, of the values and institutions of the French bourgeoisie. Our main concern, however, is with this idealism on a strictly philosophical or metaphysical plane, and here one can see a confusion of several doctrines, but in particular

of two properly distinct ones. The confusion was seized upon and clarified by perhaps the most clear-sighted of the symbolists, Remy de Gourmont, who distinguished in the thought of his contemporaries two 'idealisms':

> Il y a deux idéalismes, qualifiés chacun par un mot identique et pourtant différent, car l'un vient de idéal et l'autre de idée. L'un est l'expression d'un état d'esprit moral ou religieux; il est à peu près synonyme de spiritualisme, et c'est lui qu'emploie M. Brunetière quand cet homme dur s'attendrit sur "la renaissance de l'idéalisme".[...]
> L'autre idéalisme, qu'on aurait mieux fait d'appeler idéisme, et que Nietzsche a poussé jusqu'au phénoménalisme, est une conception philosophique du monde. Schopenhauer, qui ne l'a pas inventé, en a donné la meilleure formule: le monde est ma représentation, c'est-à-dire le monde est tel qu'il me paraît; s'il a une existence en soi, réelle, elle m'est inaccessible; il est ce que je le vois, ce que je le sens.(10)

It is the first of these doctrines - the belief in a transcendant spiritual reality and an objective source of moral guidance - which Brunetière and many others like him wish to uphold. Yet whilst one cannot deny the importance in the closing years of the nineteenth century of this doctrine, nor can one overlook the existence and importance of Gourmont's second variety of idealism, most commonly deduced from Schopenhauer, which he calls idéisme. Many amongst the symbolists who wished to believe in the former doctrine, in fact, hold to and give expression to this second type of idealism. Whilst certain of their number reduce it to a doctrine of complete solipsism, the belief that the 'self' alone is real and that the apparent external world is merely an illusion - a position which, seen from outside, in relation to an existing real world, is and can only be totally nihilistic(*).

(*) Cf. in the present Introduction the definition of 'ontological nihilism'.

Before examining the expression and prevalence of this solipsism, however, it will be useful to sketch in the background, on a philosophical plane, to its development. Its distant origins are to be found in the 'anti-positivist reaction' of the end of the nineteenth century, and in particular in the latter's questioning of the status and scope of science. This critique of science can be summed up in three main ideas. Firstly, it questioned the methods of science, pointing out that science deals not in certitudes but merely in useful hypotheses which contain merely a high degree of 'probability'; secondly, it questioned the equation of reality with the merely scientifically observable, arguing that it is only a part of total reality which is accessible to sense-perception and scientific observation; and thirdly, it questioned the doctrine of 'epistemological realism' (or 'naïve realism') held not only by such thinkers as Comte and Taine but, around the middle of the century, by the great majority of scientifically-minded thinkers - that is, the view that, through our senses and with our minds, we perceive the world exactly as it is.

The second of these lines of questioning leads to the notion, increasingly popular in certain circles at the end of the nineteenth century, of the 'unknowable'. The concept was first put forward by Spencer in England, and both he and his French followers claim that it is a concept logically deducible from the strict principles of positivism. Knowable reality, for the scientist or strict positivist, is limited to the scientifically observable and scientifically measurable. But outside of this limited field lies a vast field of experience

and possibly of reality which cannot be thus known: this is the 'unknowable'. So far the deduction may seem a reasonable one; but at this point Spencer and his French followers go on to give a capital letter to this 'unknowable', to make of it a metaphysical reality, and to equate it with a form of divine Providence - or with the Christian God. The latter is the case with Brunetière, one of the most ardent spokesmen in France for the concept of 'l'Inconnaissable'. Thus he claims in 'La Renaissance de l'Idéalisme' that "le mouvement, le progrès naturel de l'idéalisme a rétabli le sens de l'inconnaissable et celui du mystère"(11). The notion of 'le mystère' is closely bound up with that of 'l'inconnaissable', and again an illogical jump is frequently made in the form of a personification of this 'mystery', or a transition - frequent amongst the symbolists - from the notion of 'the mysterious' to that of 'the mystical'.

Of more interest to us here, however, are certain ideas being developed from the first and the third of the chief points of attack of the anti-positivist reaction. The view that science deals not in certitudes but in working hypotheses, and not in literal descriptions of reality but in abstractions and symbols, is fairly well-known by the 1890's; and linked to this is the idea that the progress of science is leading further and further away from 'reality' and into the realm of pure abstraction. Most important of all are the consequences arising from the questioning of the doctrine of 'epistemological realism'. Doctrines taking an opposite point of view to the common positivist assumption go back at least to Plato, but the most celebrated modern presentation is that of Kant. According

to Kant, we can never know the world as it is, things in themselves, because the picture of the world we have or construct is partly determined a priori by the structure of our minds; reality is distorted in and by the very act of perception. The world as it appears to us is thus in part - to use the term of Kant's part-disciple Schopenhauer - our 'representation' (Vorstellung). Most nineteenth-century empiricists, in their reaction against the old phantom of intuitive knowledge, failed to appreciate the significance of this view. But there are also many thinkers in the late nineteenth century in France, and especially in the ranks of the symbolists, who in reaction against the 'naïve realism' of earlier empiricists go to the opposite extreme and refuse all validity to the data of sense-perception (and therefore to the findings of science), ending in a position of near- or complete solipsism. Thus even Brunetière maintains that science is incapable of guaranteeing not only the validity of our picture of the outside world, but even the existence of that world: "Qui ne sait aujourd'hui que la science [...] ne peut nous garantir ni la réalité de l'existence du monde extérieur, ni même seulement qu'il existe en dehors de nous quoi que ce soit qui réponde à nos sensations[...]?" (12). In a later article, Brunetière will fall back upon the adoption of an 'As if' position as a solution to this problem: although we cannot be sure of the reality of the external world, we must nevertheless in practice act as if we were(*).

(*) Cf. 'La Métaphysique positiviste', R.D.M., 1 Oct. 1902, p. 592: "Imitons [...] plutôt Auguste Comte, et puisque tout se passe, et se passera toujours comme si le monde extérieur était ce que nous croyons qu'il est, laissons la question de son objectivité [...] aux méditations des dilettanti de la philosophie."
The adoption of such a position becomes increasingly common from the late nineteenth-century onwards, to find its most consistent and eloquent expression in the monumental Die Philosophie des 'Als ob' (1911) of the German neo-Kantian philosopher Hans Vaihinger.

Others, however, (in their theorising at least) do not allow themselves this resource.

These tendencies are further strengthened by a long series of developments in psychological research and thought in France in the years between 1870 and 1900. The influence of contemporary scientific thought upon the Parnassians and Naturalists is well known; less well known, but equally important, is the influence of contemporary developments in this particular science on the writers of the symbolist generation. After 1870, psychology in France had definitively been established as a separate branch of science, positivist and empirical in approach, divorced from metaphysics and closely linked to medecine and physiology. Major forces in this re-orientation were Taine's De l'intelligence and Ribot's La Psychologie anglaise, both published in 1870. A further major step was the founding by Ribot of the Revue philosophique in 1876,- the same year as the foundation of Mind in England and of the Vierteljahrschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie in Germany. The Revue philosophique assembled around it the leading psychological theorists of the day - men as diverse as Taine and Ribot themselves, Fouillée, Paul Janet, Frédéric Paulhan, but all of them philosophically-minded in their approach to psychology -, exercising an immense influence on psychological studies in France. Under the combined impetus given by these men and by the group of experimental psychologists led by Charcot and Pierre Janet (interested particularly in what was then called 'pathological psychology'), the study of psychology in France made remarkable progress from now on. A whole new world of the mind appeared to be opening up, a

world which stretched far beyond the confines of the rational intellect; as one student of the subject has summed up:

> alors commencent à se répandre les découvertes de la nouvelle science psychologique, qui renversent les notions les plus enracinées, qui ruinent le prestige de la raison claire, qui ouvrent une vue sur un monde inconnu, aussi merveilleux que celui des contes de fée ou celui des catéchismes.(13)

It was in the ferment of ideas in France at this time that the young Freud conceived his most important theories and his early methods of analysis. It was out of this ferment that the preoccupation of certain of the symbolists with the 'unconscious' arose. And it was out of this ferment also that symbolist 'idealism' was born.

Key amongst the ideas of the new school is that we can never, through our senses, have any direct knowledge of the external world. In the words of the Taine of 1870, "[l'] objet physique et sensible nous demeure tout à fait inconnu; tout ce que nous savons de lui, c'est le groupe de sensations qu'il provoque en nous"(14). By 1876, according to an article in the Revue philosophique, this idea is common property: "empiriques, réalistes, idéalistes et subjectivistes partent tous de ce principe que nous percevons le phénomène, mais que la réalité ou l'essence ne peut être perçue"(15). An article of 1898 maintains that: "C'est, à l'heure qu'il est, une doctrine à peu près classique, que le témoignage des sens est trompeur; que la réalité ne ressemble en rien au monde que nous révèlent nos sens"(16). Whilst in 1904, one of the leading psychologists of the day writes:

> Du monde extérieur, nous ne connaissons que nos sensations; toutes les propriétés physiques de la matière se résolvent pour nous en sensations présentes, passées ou possibles.(17)

Yet for all of these men there does at least remain a real external world; we can merely never know it as it is. These are doctrines not of 'ontological nihilism', but of an extreme form of epistemological scepticism. Some, however, begin to wonder, as the Goncourts had wondered some ten or twenty years earlier, whether in fact "toutes nos impressions de choses extérieures ne viennent pas, non des choses, mais de nous"(18). Taine, in the preface to De l'intelligence, warns the reader that in this work he will be regarding "la perception extérieure [...] comme une hallucination véridique" (19). This phrase in isolation is seized upon by several of the symbolists (most notably, as will be seen, by Jarry) and seen as expressing a denial of the reality of the 'external world'; this was doubtless not the intention of Taine, but it is certainly the case that this and other passages in the work, read out of context, contribute to such an impression. Also in the preface, for example, we read:

> De même que la substance spirituelle est un fantôme créé par la conscience, de même la substance matérielle est un fantôme créé par les sens.(20)

Whilst in volume II of the work Taine, summing up, writes:

> Nous avons trouvé que les objets que nous nommons corps ne sont que des fantômes internes, c'est-à-dire des fragments du moi, détachés de lui en apparence et opposés à lui, quoique au fond ils soient lui-même sous un autre aspect; qu'à proprement parler ce ciel, ces astres, ces arbres, tout cet univers sensible que perçoit chacun de nous, est son oeuvre, mieux encore son émanation, mieux encore sa création [...].(21)

It is perhaps worth noting in this context that whilst Taine in the 1860's and 1870's is commonly regarded as an exponent of a 'materialist' philosophy, he comes to be increasingly seen, as the century draws to a close, as an 'idealist'.

It is not only the symbolists, however, who question the reality of the external world. An article of 1877 in the Revue philosophique states:

> Ainsi tout est subjectif dans nos connaissances. Mais, s'il ne nous est pas permis d'affirmer que les choses soient telles que nous les percevons, nous est-il au moins permis d'affirmer qu'elles existent? [...] cette dernière connaissance, nous le l'avons même pas d'une manière certaine. Qui nous prouve que nos pensées successives, que les divers phénomènes psychologiques par lesquels nous passons, correspondent à des réalités extérieures à nous?(22)

Developments in the study of physiology and in particular of the human nervous system appeared to confirm such a view. As early as the first half of the nineteenth century the German physiologist Johannes Müller had discovered that the kind of sensations experienced and recorded by our sense-organs depend not on the mode of stimulation but on the nature of the organs themselves(23). Whilst in 1895 Arvède Barine noted that the contemporary scientific view that "une légère altération de la rétine ferait le monde à jamais décoloré" encouraged "le vague pressentiment que le monde réel pourrait très bien n'être qu'une apparence"(24). Three years later, an opponent of the concept claimed nonetheless that the doctrine according to which "les corps eux-mêmes, tels que nous les concevons, sont de pures apparences" has become almost universal:

> Cette théorie est généralement affirmée comme un dogme. Ce dogme est enseigné à peu près dans tous les lycées de France. Que dis-je, c'est presque un brevet de philosophie que de s'intituler idéaliste, et nos jeunes philosophes prennent conscience de leur valeur en démontrant à leurs parents ébahis que "le monde extérieur n'existe pas".(25)

Such then is the background to much of the 'idealism' of the symbolists. The analogies between the above theories

and the conception of the world of Schopenhauer are obvious, and further help to explain the popularity of the German philosopher. It is no mere accident that many of those who, like Ribot and Paul Janet, take an interest in Schopenhauer should also be philosophers with a profound interest in psychology (and in particular, in the case of Ribot at least, in the psychology of the will).

Moreover, a further analogy exists between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the thought of the 'idealist reaction' and of the symbolists, on the level of methodology; it is this that Brunetière has confusedly in mind when he claims that Schopenhauer, in the midst of the metaphysical débâcle caused by the critique of Kant, had restored metaphysics by putting it on an experimental basis - and had thus "donné le signal [...] d'une renaissance de l'idéalisme"(26). If (simplifying matters) we take Taine and Bergson (along with their literary counterparts, Zola and the symbolists) as the chief exponents of the two conflicting viewpoints of Second Empire positivism and of the later 'idealist reaction' - the one believing in the rigid determinism of the individual self and the other in its free creativity -, then a number of significant facts spring to mind from this comparison. The two men take as the starting-point of their work two entirely different branches of the sciences. Taine's starting-point is the physical sciences; he accepts their materialistic and deterministic view of the world, and attempts to integrate the human mind into this scheme; thus Taine 'disintegrates' the individual 'self', regarding it as a product of external or internal (that is, physiological) forces, and above all as merely a

succession of mental phenomena, 'une série d'événements' (whence Michelet's anguished protest on reading De l'intelligence: "Il me prend mon moi!"). Bergson, on the other hand, takes as his starting-point the science of psychology, or more explicitly the immediate experiences of the individual self (mind or consciousness) - hence the title of his first major work, Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience. A philosophy which starts off from "le fait psychique de l'expérience" - this was Fouillée's definition of idealism, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. And Bergson himself later described his philosophy as an attempt to "porter la métaphysique sur le terrain de l'expérience"(27). Now, Bergson's work is merely the culmination of a series of developments in philosophical and psychological thought from the time of the Second Empire onwards; and the starting-point of all of these philosophies is fundamentally the same as that of Schopenhauer. Ribot in particular emphasizes that Schopenhauer's 'will' (the starting-point of his philosophy) is for him first and foremost an object of direct experience; it is "ce que chacun connaît immédiatement". Indeed, the terms used by Ribot in paraphrasing the German philosopher are reminiscent of those of Bergson:

> La seule connaissance immédiate que nous ayons est celle de notre Volonté. C'est le datum qui peut nous servir de clef pour tout le reste.(28)

The case has been argued, in fact, for a direct influence of Schopenhauer on Bergson(29). What is in any case certain is that Schopenhauer contributed to and helped to form the climate of ideas out of which the thought of Bergson crystallised, the most general feature of which is this directing of attention back to the individual self and the data of immediate experience as a basis for any description of the world. And it is

here that the thinking of the symbolists begins, with a restoration of the individual self as a metaphysical entity, considered as a free creative agent at the centre of the world.

But there are also important differences between the philosophies of Bergson and Schopenhauer, and in particular between the idealism of the former and that being deduced by the symbolists from the latter. Both Bergson and the symbolists wish to emphasize the free creativity of the self; but where Bergson sees the dominant faculty of the self as 'intuition', Schopenhauer sees it as 'will'. Both ideas are taken up by the symbolists, but, whilst not discounting the importance amongst them of the concepts of 'intuition' and of the 'unconscious', as of dream, it is the developments from the Schopenhauerian conception - which Ribot had considered to be the German philosopher's most important discovery - which are of special interest here. Schopenhauer's affirmation (as presented by Ribot) that "l'intelligence est l'instrument de la volonté, comme le marteau est celui du forgeron"(30) is developed by certain amongst the symbolists into a belief that the whole of reality is a creation not only of the 'self', but of the individual <u>will</u>, that 'truth' itself is dependent upon the will(*).

There are thus a number of important <u>concordances</u> between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and developments in France in

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(*) Cf. the following passage (from the English translation of <u>Die Welt</u>), one of several which could lend themselves to such an interpretation: "But it follows from the point of view of our system that the will is not only free, but almighty. From it proceeds not only its action, but also its world; and as the will is, so does its action and its world become. Both are the self-knowledge of the will and nothing more. The will determines itself, and at the same time both its action and its world; for beside it there is nothing, and these are the will itself." (<u>The World as Will and Idea</u>., tr. J. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, London, 1906, vol. I, p. 351).

contemporary philosophy and psychology; and the solipsism of the symbolists is basically a deduction from Schopenhauer, supported by the evidence of these developments. One final point is required, however, to set this deduction fully in perspective, namely the view commonly held of Kant in these years and of the relationship between Kant and Schopenhauer. Amongst non-French philosophers, it is Kant whose influence in France is greatest after 1870. But this influence, where it is constructive, is so solely in the ethical field - in the attempts of the neo-criticists, in particular Renouvier, to derive a purely secular ethic from the moral philosophy of Kant and to introduce this ethic into the teaching of French schools under the Third Republic(*). But in the field of metaphysics, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Kant is seen essentially as a sceptic, and even a destroyer, and as the theoretician of the relativity of all

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(*) According to Louis Weber, Secretary of the Société Française de Philosophie, in 1902: "Le catéchisme qu'ont appris tous ceux qui enseignent aujourd'hui la philosophie dans les établissements publics est extrait de Kant et de ses disciples." (Reply to Jacques MORLAND's "Enquête sur l'influence allemande", Mercure de France, Nov. 1902, p. 382).

Even so, the prevailing attitude towards Kant's ethical philosophy outside of these milieux appears to have been one of general scepticism. Although himself no longer holding this view, Brunetière in 1896 confirms that this is nonetheless the prevailing one, testifying to the general neglect of, and even contempt for, the Critique of Practical Reason, still considered by most, according to Brunetière, as merely deriving from "un effet de compassion et de prudence bourgeoise" ('La Renaissance de l'Idéalisme', Discours de combat, I, 1902, p. 5, Note). A similar point of view is expressed by Gourmont in the preface to Le Livre des Masques (1896), and, six years later, by many of the contributors to Morland's "Enquête" in the Mercure de France. The latter reveals also, moreover, a growing hostility to 'Kantian rationalism' and official neo-Kantian ethics on the part of those hostile to the 'rationalist' Third Republic. For many of these, first Schopenhauer, and then Nietsche, is used to oppose the teaching of Kant.

knowledge. Such is in essence the young Barrès' view of Kant; such is also, in 1886, that of Brunetière, who brackets Hume and Kant together as arch-sceptics(31). Jules de Gaultier, in 1902, expresses the common view of the Critique of Pure Reason as having brought about "le suicide de la métaphysique en tant que science"(32). Whilst amongst philosophers, Ribot is typical in considering Kant as essentially a critic and a sceptic, the initiator of a metaphysical débâcle which modern science has confirmed(33). It is against the background of this view of the collapse of all metaphysical systems, and of the consequent impossibility of any real knowledge of the external world, that the place of Schopenhauer in these years must be seen.

The immediate deduction from Schopenhauer of the solipsism which we are discussing is easy to see. Challemel-Lacour presents the German philosopher as upholding a Berkeley-type doctrine; the following is his explanation of Schopenhauer's conception of the world as 'representation':

> Supposez le spectateur autrement constitué - doué par exemple d'une autre organisation cérébrale, - le spectacle change; supposez-le entièrement supprimé, la scène elle-même s'abîme dans la nuit. Si vous imaginez qu'il en subsiste quelque chose, c'est qu'il vous est difficile d'effacer de votre esprit jusqu'à l'idée d'une intelligence possible. [...] En un mot, l'univers n'existe plus, parce qu'il est, tel que nous le sentons et qu'il nous apparaît, un phénomène cérébral.

And again, paraphrasing Schopenhauer: "Le monde est un phénomène cérébral"(34). A similar presentation of Schopenhauer's doctrine as little more than mere solipsism is made by Fouillée in an article of 1881:

> D'où viennent les apparences que m'offre l'univers? On connaît la réponse de Schopenhauer: elles naissent de la constitution de mon intelligence, qui tient elle-même à la constitution de mon cerveau. Supprimez toutes les têtes pensantes, avec leurs organes, aussitôt le soleil s'éteint, la mer se tait, la fleur se décolore, le monde visible s'évanouit.(35)

Similarly, extracts in Bourdeau's anthologies present Schopenhauer's view of life as an ephemeral dream of "l'esprit infini des choses", of universal Will, and stress his 'Buddhistic' view of Maya, the veil of illusion cast over all things. Frequently in these years a confusion is found, even amongst professional philosophers, between the ideas of Schopenhauer and those of Fichte (enjoying, along with Schelling and Hegel, a brief return to favour at this time as part of a general influx of German thought)(*). Finally, of prime importance in introducing Schopenhauer is Ribot's monograph of 1874; attention has already been drawn to this, and there can be no doubt that Ribot's study was a major source for the symbolists. Téodor de Wyzewa expressly urged a reading of Ribot on all prospective 'idealists'(36); whilst Gourmont's Sixtine (1890) contains numerous invocations of Ribot (who is actually called "maître"), and a short story by Gourmont published in 1889 is dedicated to him(37). From Schopenhauer, via Ribot and Bourdeau (Burdeau?), the symbolists had learned, according

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(*) For example, Charles Lévêque in his article on 'L'Esthétique de Schopenhauer' in the Journal des Savants (11 June 1875) presents Schopenhauer, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel as all expounding an essentially identical 'idealism'.

André Gide writes of his youth that "Schopenhauer et Fichte m'ont nourri et m'ont formé, ont décidé de ma pensée" (Cit. Jean DELAY, La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Paris, Gallimard, 1956, tome I, p. 410). Gide's Journal for the early 1890's, in fact, contains several references to Schopenhauer. And looking back in Si le grain ne meurt to his 'année de philosophie', he writes: "Je me consolais avec Schopenhauer. Je pénétrai dans son Monde comme représentation et comme volonté [sic] avec un ravissement indicible, le lus de part en part, et le relus avec une application de pensée dont, durant de longs mois, aucun appel du dehors ne put me distraire.[...] mon initiation philosophique, c'est à Schopenhauer, et à lui seul, que je la dois." (Gallimard, 1955, p. 237). In the Journal for 1924 there also occurs the note: "Ah! la philosophie allemande trouvait en moi un terrain bien propice. Quand je lus le Monde comme Représentation de Schopenhauer, je pensai aussitôt: c'est donc ça!" (Journal, 1889-39, Gallimard, Ed. de la Pléiade, 1951, p. 800.)

It should be mentioned, however, that frequently the names of philosophers such as the above were merely used to justify ideas conceived independently of them.

to Gourmont,

> à la fois que le monde était mauvais et qu'il n'existait que relativement à nous-mêmes. "L'univers est ma représentation", la formule avait pénétré dans toutes les cervelles où il pénètre quelque chose [...].(38)

This is not to accuse Ribot himself of presenting Schopenhauer as the exponent of a crude solipsism. He stresses the fundamental importance of the latter's view that "le monde est ma représentation", that the world around us "n'existe que comme représentation, c'est-à-dire par rapport à une autre chose, le sujet percevant". But he also emphasizes that this is true only of the world as we know it, of our picture of the world, correcting Challemel-Lacour's paraphrase of Schopenhauer - "le monde est un phénomène cérébral" - to "le monde tel que nous le percevons est évidemment un phénomène cérébral". And Ribot adds a few pages later that it is a misunderstanding of Schopenhauer's doctrine to believe that "elle nie la réalité du monde au sens vulgaire du mot [...]. Cet idéalisme procède non de Berkeley, mais de l'analyse de Kant"(39). Yet Ribot's own anti-intellectualist philosophy, his insistence on the primacy of will over intellect in man, did cause him to emphasize Schopenhauer's doctrine of the world as 'representation'; and there are numerous passages in La Philosophie de Schopenhauer which, read out of context, could be taken as an expression of a purely solipsistic view: for example, the statement that "la matière est l'objet non de l'intuition, mais de la pensée; par suite, c'est une pure abstraction"; that the external world "a sa source dans l'intelligence (faculté de la représentation) [...], il naît avec elle, dure avec elle, meurt avec elle"; or finally that, given that our only immediate knowledge is of the will and that

this is therefore the key to an understanding of nature, we must turn inwards to obtain a knowledge of reality: "nous devons chercher à comprendre la nature d'après nous-mêmes et non pas nous-mêmes d'après la nature"(40). Given the lack of proper philosophical training, if not patience, of most of the symbolists, it is reasonable to assume that a complete understanding of such a dense and technical work as Ribot's (for all its clarity) would be rare amongst them. Subtract the qualification that it is only the world as we know it which is our 'representation' and one has the common symbolist understanding of Schopenhauer, reinforced by the influence of Challemel-Lacour and even perhaps by certain passages from the writings of Schopenhauer himself which, through a tendency to overstatement, may well have added to such a one-sided view. Such a passage is the opening paragraph of Book I of Die Welt, direct and challenging in the 1888 translation of Burdeau:

> Le monde est ma représentation. - Cette proposition est une vérité pour tout être vivant et pensant, bien que, chez l'homme seul, elle arrive à se transformer en connaissance abstraite et réfléchie. [...] Il possède alors l'entière certitude de ne connaître ni un soleil ni une terre, mais seulement un oeil qui voit ce soleil, une main qui touche cette terre; il sait, en un mot, que le monde dont il est entouré n'existe que comme représentation, dans son rapport avec un être percevant, qui est l'homme lui-même. S'il est une vérité qu'on puisse affirmer a priori, c'est bien celle-là.(41)

Yet whatever the direct sources of their knowledge of Schopenhauer, the fact remains that many of the symbolists tend to seize upon this doctrine and to reduce it to a nihilistic solipsism. Examples of this vulgarisation, and expressions of such a solipsism, are numerous. Edouard Rod (whose knowledge of Schopenhauer seems to derive primarily from Challemel-

Lacour) writes of the former in 1891: "il était idéaliste; il croyait que les phénomènes n'ont de réalité que dans notre esprit"(42). Whilst in Rod's La Course à la mort (1885) the narrator speaks of "mon coeur [...] qui déforme toutes les choses ou peut-être les crée"(43). A character of Jean Moréas, in a leading article in the opening number of the review Le Symboliste, claims: "l'objectif n'est que pur semblant, qu'apparence vaine, qu'il dépend de moi de varier, de transmuer et d'anéantir à mon gré"(44). In similar vein, the young critic Jules de Gaultier claims that "le réel n'est qu'une présomption qui a triomphé". Laforgue at times gives expression to a view of the world as a dream, writing to Gustave Kahn for example: "Enfin, peut-être Tout n'est-il que rêve"(45). The young Barrès writes in the context of his 'Culte du Moi': "La réalité, qu'il s'agisse des choses d'aujourd'hui, de l'histoire, ou de la mythologie n'offre aucun intérêt artistique. Elle est même un mot dépourvu de sens"; from which he concludes: "Il convient que nous nous en tenions à la seule réalité, au Moi."(46). The young Gide writes in his Journal in 1891: "Je ne parviens jamais à me persuader tout à fait de l'existence réelle/de certaines choses. Il me semble toujours qu'elles n'existent plus quand je n'y pense plus [...]."(47)(*)

(*) Gide later claimed that, in his symbolist period, he and others had based on Schopenhauer a doctrine of the 'contingency' of the world - a conception which seems to embrace both contingency in the strict philosophical sense, and the dependence of the reality of the world upon the mind which perceives it. He writes in Si le grain ne meurt: "Soutenu par Schopenhauer, à qui je ne comprenais pas que certains pussent préférer Hegel, je tenais pour "contingence" (c'est le mot dont on se servait) tout ce qui n'était pas "absolu", toute la prismatique diversité de la vie. Pour chacun de mes compagnons il en allait à peu près de même; et l'erreur n'était pas de chercher à dégager quelque beauté et quelque vérité d'ordre général de l'inextricable fouillis que présentait alors le "réalisme"; mais bien, par parti pris, de tourner le dos à la réalité." (Gallimard, 1955, p. 259).

Whilst the master himself, Mallarmé, at times appears to give expression to a similar view, as for example in the cryptic statement: "Moi n'étant pas, rien ne serait." Such in any case is the view attributed to Mallarmé by his younger disciples; Téodor de Wyzewa, for example, writes of him in 1886:

> Il admit la réalité du monde, mais il l'admit comme une réalité de fiction. La nature avec ses chatoyantes féeries, le spectacle rapide et coloré des nuages, et les sociétés humaines effarées, ce sont rêves de l'âme: réels, mais tous rêves ne sont-ils point réels?(48)

In this general tendency towards a doctrine of solipsism, one of the most instructive examples of all is that of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, seen by many as instrumental in bringing about the new vogue of 'idealism' in France (Gourmont describes him as "le restaurateur de l'idéalisme littéraire"(49)). Yet this idealism of Villiers is not a belief in any objective spiritual reality, but, ultimately at least, the expression of a nihilistic solipsism. It says a good deal for the lack of philosophical training of the symbolists that Villiers could be enthusiastically considered by almost all of them as an authority on German idealism, and on Hegel in particular (Mallarmé, in his lecture on Villiers delivered shortly after the latter's death in 1889, refers to Villiers' "considerable reading" of Kant, Aquinas and especially "un désigné par lui le Titan de l'Esprit Humain, Hegel", and praises his friend for his "vast understanding" of German idealism(50)). In fact, Villier's knowledge of these philosophers was fragmentary in the extreme; but he is significant in that he evolves from a vaguely 'Hegelian' philosophy to, ultimately, the total solipsism and nihilism of Axël. This work will be discussed in detail in a later chapter; but the mere fact that Villiers' final philosophy could be enthusiastically accepted as 'idealism' by the majority of his symbolist admirers is in itself

an eloquent comment.

Probably the most coherent spokesman of all for symbolist 'idealism' is Remy de Gourmont. Most of the time in his theorizing, Gourmont does manage to remain aware that the statement 'the world is my representation' is true only of the world as it appears to me, while heralding with great enthusiasm the new doctrine. Thus in the preface to Le Livre des Masques (1896) he exclaims that "une vérité toute nouvelle", "une vérité toute métaphysique" has recently entered literature and the arts:

> Cette vérité, évangélique et merveilleuse, libératrice et rénovatrice, c'est le principe de l'idéalité du monde. Par rapport à l'homme, sujet pensant, le monde, tout ce qui est extérieur au moi, n'existe que selon l'idée qu'il s'en fait.[...] C'est ce que Schopenhauer a vulgarisé sous cette formule si simple et si claire: Le monde est ma représentation. Je ne vois pas ce qui est; ce qui est, c'est ce que je vois. Autant d'hommes pensants, autant de mondes divers et peut-être différents.(51)

Yet even here, Gourmont comes perilously close to a vulgar solipsism; and at other times, he seems to take this 'representation' to be the only reality:

> On ne connaît que sa propre intelligence, que soi, seule réalité, le monde spécial et unique que le moi détient, véhicule, déforme, exténue, recrée selon sa personnelle activité; rien ne se meut en dehors du sujet connaissant.(52)

Thus in Gourmont's novel Sixtine (1890), subtitled 'Roman de la vie cérébrale', the hero, Hubert d'Entragues, lives purely in a world of private fantasy, even doubting the existence of an 'external world'(*). For all his play with the idea of

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(*) This belief in the 'unreality' of the world is held concurrently by d'Entragues with a belief in the 'absurdity' of life. Cf. his reflection during a train journey: "Les trains ont un but; la vie n'en a pas. Mais c'est précisément l'originalité de la vie de n'en pas avoir, de but. Parfois je lui trouve, ainsi qu'à une vieille dentelle, le charme même de l'inutilité." (Sixtine, Mercure de France, 1918, p. 22).

this unreality, however, Gourmont does realise - at least ultimately - the web of contradictions into which his brilliant paradoxes lead(*). Nevertheless, the influence of his ideas amongst his fellow-symbolists is enormous, and, as we shall see, perhaps greatest of all upon that ultra-symbolist, the young Alfred Jarry.

If Gourmont is the most coherent spokesman for symbolist 'idealism', the wildest - and also the most influential - of all 'idealists' is undoubtedly Téodor de Wyzewa, who, in a series of articles in the Revue Wagnérienne, La Vogue and the Revue Indépendante from 1885 onwards set himself up as the chief theoretician amongst the 'littérateurs' of his day on questions of aesthetics and philosophy. Speaking of the 'idealism' of Villiers, the culmination of which he sees in

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(*) Thus, for example, in Sixtine, where 'art' is defined as simply "la faculté d'objectiver en un simulacre la représentation individuelle du monde", Gourmont's hero d'Entragues even reaches the point of doubting the 'reality' of this art: "Entragues doutait encore. L'art n'était-il pas, lui aussi, une illusion? Si le monde extérieur n'est que fantômes que peut-il recréer, sinon des fantômes [...]?" (Sixtine, Mercure de France, 1918, pp. 58, 75-76).

In a later essay, 'Les Racines de l'idéalisme' (1904), Gourmont interestingly links his (now somewhat modified) 'idealism' to a doctrine of pure 'materialism' - a physiological materialism reminiscent of the later Barrès, which denies any independent reality to thought or reason, seeing these merely as a product of physiological reflexes: "La conception d'un monde extérieur exactement connaissable n'est compatible qu'avec la croyance à la raison, c'est-à-dire à l'âme, c'est-à-dire encore à l'existence d'un principe immuable, incorruptible, immortel, aux jugements infaillibles. Si au contraire la connaissance du monde est le travail d'un humble produit physiologique, la pensée, produit qui diffère en qualité, en modalité, d'homme à homme, d'espèce à espèce, le monde peut être considéré comme inconnaissable, puisque chaque cerveau ou chaque système nerveux retire de sa vision et de son contact une image différente [...]." Hence for Gourmont: "Idéalisme veut dire matérialisme; et, à l'inverse, matérialisme veut dire idéalisme." (Promenades philosophiques, I, Mercure de France, 13e éd., 1931, pp. 104-5.)

Axël, Wyzewa writes:

> L'esprit ne sort jamais de lui-même. L'univers que nous croyons réél est formé de nos idées, et nos idées sont la création de notre âme. Seule donc vit notre âme; elle est tout le Réel.(53)

"Seule vit notre âme" was the epigraph of Edouard Dujardin's novel Les Hantises (1886) which, according to Lehmann, was quoted ad nauseam both by the author and by Wyzewa(54). Elsewhere, in an essay on Wagner, the latter maintains that

> l'Essence des choses [...] c'est le Moi, c'est la volonté individuelle, créant le monde des apparences.[...] L'univers où nous vivons est un rêve, un rêve que volontairement nous rêvons.(55)

And in a further essay on Wagner:

> Le monde où nous vivons, et que nous dénommons réel, est une pure création de notre âme. L'esprit ne peut sortir de lui-même; et les choses qu'il croit extérieures à lui sont uniquement des idées. Voir, entendre, c'est créer en soi des apparences, donc créer la Vie.(56)

Wyzewa even goes on to develop an ingenious evolutionary theory describing how these 'appearances', once conceived, are passed on from one generation to the next, becoming in the course of time 'innate ideas': thus we have come to mistake these 'appearances' for reality itself! This wild mixture of Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Plato, Darwin, Lamarck and Wyzewa is doubtless an extreme manifestation; yet it was a point of view highly respected by many of Wyzewa's literary collegues - Barrès among them -, and, if extreme, a manifestation of a tendency sufficiently widespread and sufficiently significant for one critic to have been led to speak of a "crise du concept de réalité" in this generation of young writers and intellectuals as a whole.

The consequences of such a solipsistic metaphysics for symbolist aesthetics are obvious. If "le monde où nous vivons

[...] est une pure création de notre âme", then of course the artist is totally free both to ignore the 'reality' of his contemporaries, and to create his own world at will - a conclusion which both Wyzewa and Gourmont, amongst others, hasten to emphasize. Gourmont, in fact, argues that originality is the only aim of art, and that conversely "le crime capital pour un écrivain c'est le conformisme, l'imitativité, la soumission aux règles et aux enseignements"; thus symbolism is the expression of an absolute individualism in art. Moreover, art is and can only be self-representation: "La seule excuse qu'on homme ait d'écrire, c'est de s'écrire lui-même, de dévoiler aux autres la sorte de monde qui se mire en son miroir individuel"(57). Thus the metaphysical theories of the symbolists exercise a profound influence upon their representation of 'reality' in their literary works; and although a complete examination of this question lies outside the bounds of the present study(58), it is worth mentioning briefly a number of significant consequences.

The idea that art, far from being, as in naturalist theory, description of a more-or-less objectively perceived external world, is merely a projection or 'representation' of the 'self' of the individual artist goes a long way towards explaining the subjectivism of symbolist literature. It helps to explain also the rise of that "école cérébrale" of which Octave Mirbeau wrote in 1888(59) and of which Barrès, in his Culte du Moi trilogy, and Jarry are perfect representatives. This 'cerebralism' in turn throws light on certain features of the 'decadent' literature of these years, in particular its concentration on the image of the androgyne - a transference

to a sexual plane of the common image of Narcissus. On a less explicitly sexual level, a preoccupation, explicit or implicit, with the image of Narcissus runs through symbolist literature from Laforgue and Mallarmé to Barrès, Gourmont, Jarry, and Gide's Traité du Narcisse of 1891 (Valéry's Monsieur Teste (1896) belongs to the same period also). "Je le pense à tous les jours de ma vie: méditer sur soi-même est la vie de la vie; et nous y méditons si peu!",Gide wrote in his Journal in 1894, translating Lavater(60). It is indeed no accident that, as Lehmann points out, "symbolism has enriched the repertory of modern civilisation by only one myth, and that a renovated one - Narcissus"(61). Particular incarnations of this myth can be found in Mallarmé's Igitur and Villiers' Axël, both reminiscent in their own way of Faust, yet both ultimately negatives of Faust: both end in sterility and nihilism, the ultimate consequence of the solipsism to which symbolist theory (at least) tends. Whilst perhaps the ultimate incarnation of the myth of Narcissus can be found in Jarry's Père Ubu. A final point worth mentioning is the attitude of certain amongst the symbolists towards language. For if everything is merely a creation of the 'self', then so too is language; and thus language tends to lose its referential or symbolic value (as a means of communication, pointing to something beyond itself) to become, at times for Mallarmé, and even more for his disciple Jarry, an object of creation or re-creation, autonomous and absolute, an end in itself.

The final question to be asked is of course: how seriously is this tendency towards a nihilistic solipsism to be taken? And is it restricted to the sphere of aesthetic speculation, or does it have implications in a moral sphere as well?

Lehmann argues in his study of The Symbolist Aesthetic that, for the symbolists, philosophical 'idealism' offered merely a series of slogans which well suited the polemical needs of the movement, and which provided convenient props for certain of their new aesthetic doctrines(62). An idealism which, by tending to deny the reality of the external world, sets the 'self' at the centre of the world as a free and autonomous creative agent - this certainly conforms to the symbolist exaltation of artistic freedom and originality in every shape and form, and there can be no doubt that the vogue of such idealist doctrines owes something to this particular artistic need. The link can be seen in the above quotations from Gourmont and Wyzewa. The latter in particular argues that by believing the existing world to be real we have become enslaved to it and have lost "la conscience joyeuse de notre pouvoir créateur"(63). And time and time again Wyzewa returns to the image of Plato's prisoner in the cave, surrounded by terrifying phantoms which are in reality merely the creatures of his own imagination; once he realizes this he shakes off his chains and is free, no longer a captive of illusions but the "Mage divin"(64). But at the same time, this causal relationship may be reversed, the initial belief in the 'ideality' or unreality of the external world giving rise to a sense of the freedom and autonomy of the individual self. To dismiss symbolist idealism as merely a series of slogans used to support an artistic goal is to overlook both the extent and philosophical basis of this idealism. Behind its manifestations lies the influence of the doctrines of Schopenhauer and the rôle of Challemel-Lacour, Ribot and others in introducing

them, and behind this again lies the influence of a long series of developments in both philosophical and psychological theory in France itself - as this chapter has tried to show. Behind the image of Narcissus lies a falling back upon the 'self', which is at once a product and a source of both the apparent collapse of all 'meaning' and objective values in the world, and of doubts concerning the very reality of that world - that is to say, of 'metaphysical', 'moral' and 'ontological' nihilism wrapped into one.

Yet such idealist conceptions are difficult to hold in the face of concrete reality, just as Dr. Johnson's "I refute it thus", whatever its status as a philosophical argument, remains a convincing argument in practical terms against Berkeleyan idealism. In fact, behind the discovery of 'absurdity' and the tendency towards this solipsism prominent in these years lie also factors of a social and political order. Here is a further source of the popularity of Schopenhauer: his aesthetic philosophy provided a theoretical justification for an attitude of withdrawal from political and social concern into a mystical realm of 'art'. As Schopenhauer's French commentators were not slow to stress, art, for him, represents a 'deliverance' from the sphere of tormenting will; hence the artist, through his creation, rises above the categories of temporality and causality, disdaining practical affairs and isolating himself in a higher sphere of art and beauty. Ribot gives a splendid summing-up of the master's view in his remarks concerning 'le Génie':

> Il s'isole ainsi dans une sorte de sphère supérieure, où la vie n'apparaît que pour être contemplée et embellie;[...] l'art fait profession d'être inutile comme la philosophie même; le génie [...] ignore du

> monde tout ce qui est étranger à la beauté; aussi, malgré sa puissance et sa supériorité, préfère-t-il le rôle de roi sans couronne, voué à une solitude sublime [...].(65)

In almost all of the symbolists one finds (at least in this phase of their career) the same revulsion against the 'vulgar reality' of the contemporary world, against its 'mediocrity' (that is, its egalitarianism and democratic ideals) and artistic commercialism - and, by reaction, the same tendency towards the sacerdotalisation of the artist. The justification given by symbolist idealism to such an attitude of withdrawal is obvious: if political and social problems - in Wyzewa's words, "les sociétés humaines effarées" - are mere illusions, "rêves de l'âme", then the artist is free from any obligation to concern himself with them. It is with an examination of the social and political ideas of the literary community in France at the end of the nineteenth century - and in particular with the concept of 'decadence' in the 1880's and the literary 'anarchism' of the 1890's - that the next chapter will be concerned.

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Chapter VI: THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND: 'DECADENCE' AND 'ANARCHISM'.

Nihilism has been defined as a product of reflection. One may therefore usefully ask under what conditions - on a personal and social plane - a man may be likely to 'think himself into' a position of nihilism. Other factors being equal, such a development is least likely to occur in a man who feels himself to be firmly 'integrated' into a community of some kind (nation, social class, local community, or the like); such a man has a sense of 'belonging', is carried along by social convention and by the force of accepted ideas, unaware of any need to question these ideas and values. Conversely, one would most expect to find nihilistic modes of thought amongst those who in some way or other feel themselves to be 'outsiders', devoid of any such sense of belonging. Moreover, there is frequently a relationship between this feeling and metaphysical conceptions of the absence of any 'justification' for existence as a whole. As a case in point, one might take the hero of Sartre's La Nausée: Roquentin has nothing but contempt for (and a secret envy of?) the nineteenth-century bourgeois whose portraits he observes, because these are men who believed that they had a 'right' to exist, to act, to posess, who imagined that their lives had a given 'meaning', partly at least through the belief that they had an assigned place in society and a recognized rôle to play. Whereas in Roquentin himself, the absence of any sense of social 'justification' for his own life is clearly linked to, and perhaps precipitates, his belief in the absence of any metaphysical 'justification' for existence. At the same time,

the solitude of such a man both encourages, and is in turn deepened by, a process of critical and corrosive reflection which may lead to nihilism.

The relevance of such considerations to the literary scene in France in the years between 1870 and 1900 forms the subject of this chapter. Generalising broadly, these years are marked by the existence of a very large number of bourgeois writers and intellectuals violently hostile to the bourgeois world from which they sprang and feeling profoundly alienated from that world and its values, yet at the same time unable to identify with any other social class or group. The Barrésian concept of déracinement - whatever its specific propagandistic intent - applies in a general sense to a great many writers and intellectuals of this age, men who deeply feel themselves to be 'outsiders', standing apart from the main body of the society of their time.

The idea is of course not new, and nor is the situation which it describes. The roots of the latter go back at least to the days of Romanticism, whilst amongst writers and intellectuals of the Second Empire a sense of divorce between themselves and existing social and political institutions is already pronounced; the 'solitude morale' of Romantics and Parnassians is a subject well known and which has been adequately discussed(*). The causes of this are complex and

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(*) The poetry of the Parnassians (as represented by the second Parnasse contemporain, prepared for publication in 1869 though not published until 1871) has been analysed by Charles GRIVEL ('Matériaux pour servir à l'examen sociologique de la poésie à la fin du Second Empire', Neophilologus, Jan. 1966, pp. 44-59) in terms of themes expressing a hatred of the present and an imaginary flight towards a better past (though rarely a better future). The present is invariably associated with the loss of illusions, the stamping out of freedom, with ugliness, perfidy, indignity, bourgeois mercantilism, etc., etc./

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can be no more than indicated in passing here: the break-up by the Revolution of 1789 of an old social order, the failure of the Revolution of 1848 and the crushing blow delivered in its wake to liberal, socialist and humanitarian idealism, the smugness and materialism of the Empire, and many other factors, are all involved. Moreover, Parnassians, Naturalists, 'Decadents' and Symbolists all share both to a considerable extent a common philosophical heritage, and also a similar social and political heritage. The Empire may have been swept away, but the establishment of the Republic in the midst of defeat in war followed by the confusion of civil war and its aftermath scarcely encouraged unquestioning hope for the future. And if the last years of the Empire saw a resurgence of both liberal-republican and left-wing idealism, the latter at least was smashed in the bloody suppression of the Commune, an event which set back the progress of French socialism by twenty to thirty years. No doubt much of the 'mystique républicaine' which in the last years of the Empire had united bourgeois and workers in a common struggle (or at least common opposition) survived the events of 1870-71 intact; but what had become of 'la République sociale', of which so much had been heard before 1870? There was little in the France of the 1870's and beyond to persuade the

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Cont. from p. 127:
/ The author's sociological analysis concludes: "Au terme de cette démonstration [...], un résultat clair a été obtenu: dans les 195 pièces-témoins de la production poétique à la fin du Second Empire, de quelque manière qu'il soit tourné et sous la plus anodine apparence peut-être, le poème exprime systématiquement le désaccord d'un groupe (formé de l'auteur et des lecteurs implicitement acquis à son idée, participant de la même conscience) avec l'état actuel de la société dont il fait partie, le poème n'est qu'un "non"." (ibid., p. 57. Italics in original).

Cf. also an earlier, but still worthwhile, study by René CANAT, Du sentiment de la solitude morale chez les romantiques et [redacted] Parnassiens, Paris, 1902.

working- and lower middle-classes or their sympathizers that there was anything to benefit them in the 'minimum de république' agreed on between the conservative Republican Thiers and the once radical Gambetta, both of them desperately anxious to avoid a social revolution. The result was a progressive alienation from the affairs of the country of at least one-third of its population, an alienation which went hand in hand with the existence of an ideological void on the left during the 1870's and a good part of the 1880's. It is interesting and ironical to note that the extreme Left came to join with the extreme Right in seeing the new Republic as little more than a conspiracy of self-seeking bourgeois politicians, both sides at one time throwing their weight behind the Boulangist movement in an attempt to topple the Republic. To a very considerable extent much of the spurning of political involvement amongst the writers and intellectuals of France in these years, as also much of the 'egoism' of men like Barrès, represents a reaction to the pettiness, the intrigues, the machinations of political parties, and the financial scandals, of the Third Republic.

It is in the years after 1870, moreover, that the literary and artistic bohème - once romantic and idealised with Murger(1), then a place of misery and political ferment with Vallès(2) - reaches a peak of prominence. It is out of the literary clubs and cafés of this milieu - Les Hydropathes, Le Chat Noir, Les Hirsutes, Les Jemenfoutistes, Les Zutistes, and the like(3) - that first the 'decadent' and then symbolist movements are born(*).

(*) Cf. A. G. LEHMANN, The Symbolist Aesthetic, p. 238: "The most generally known and accepted fact about French poets towards the end of the nineteenth century is that they had their roots deep in a deliberately eccentric, even anti-social intelligentsia."

Whatever the profound causes, however, it is in the literature of the years after 1870 that the professed contempt of the Parnassians for a socially 'useful' art reaches its peak in a flood of expressions of anti-social sentiments, of an attitude of would-be withdrawal from all political and social involvement, and of a sense of 'alienation' from the values and institutions of the bourgeois society of the day. In the 1880's and 1890's the young are taxed time and time again with a life-denying 'pessimism'(*). Jules Lemaître in 1885 finds in "ceux qui écrivent et qui sont censés représenter une partie au moins de l'élite" for the most part a "pessimisme noir", at the root of which he sees "une immense fatigue intellectuelle, une impuissance qui voudrait se nier et qui s'agite désespérément", and "une indifférence absolue à l'égard de tout, morale, raison, science": "on ne veut rien, on attend. Rien où se prendre! personne à qui s'attacher!"(4). Remy de Gourmont sees his generation in retrospect as "une génération lassée d'avance des lourdes querelles politiques et sociales"(5). Anatole Baju, founder-editor of the influential Le Décadent, declaring that "la littérature décadente synthétise l'esprit de notre époque, c'est-à-dire de l'élite intellectuelle de la société moderne",

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(*) This 'pessimism' is embraced above all by the young and to some extent used by them as a stick with which to beat their elders: Caro describes works expounding it as "jetés comme un défi à l'optimisme scientifique et industrielle du siècle" (Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle, 1878, p. i).

Behind this pessimism and cult of Schopenhauer, moreover, there lies also at times a political motive. Schopenhauer is used by the young to oppose the optimism and professed humanitarian sentiments of their elders - and later by men like Barrès to attack the Kantian ethics of the Republic. Cf. Claude DIGEON, La Crise allemande de la pensée française, P.U.F., 1959, p. 338: "dans la France républicaine et vaincue, cette influence exerce une action politique contraire à celle du rationalisme kantien [...] les groupes qui utilisent consciemment la philosophie pessimiste sont les groupes qui s'opposent à l'optimisme de l'idéologie romantique et humanitaire."

goes on to define in splendidly melodramatic terms the moral outlook of this élite:

> Notre époque n'est point malade; elle est fatiguée, elle est écoeurée surtout.[...] l'homme intellectuel sent un dégoût profond et le spleen incurable, inévitable, l'assaille [...] Oh! ce spleen n'est point celui des empereurs blasés de pouvoir, de femmes et d'orgies; il est plus noir, plus intense, plus irrémédiable, puisqu'il porte à maudire l'existence, appeler la Mort et souhaiter le Néant.[...] La littérature décadente se propose de refléter l'image de ce monde spleenétique.(6)

In 1892 a young literary critic named Léon Blum, in his first published article, describes the 'intellectuals' of the present generation as characterised by "désintéressement et indifférence pour tout ce qui touche la politique [...] la passion politique est morte, et rien n'y supplée. Les intellectuels s'ennuient."(7). And Gide, looking back, sees his former fellow-symbolists as lacking all curiosity in real life: "A la seule exception de Viélé-Griffin peut-être [...] tous furent des pessimistes, des renonçants, des résignés [...]."(8). Behind the latters' attraction to mediaeval settings, their passion for Wagner, the fairy-tale décor of much of their poetry, their preoccupation with dream and with a notoriously vague and ill-defined 'Ideal', lies in fact a profound refusal of the present and of the contemporary world, and the dream of an impossible escape from it(*). As the Nouvelle Rive Gauche (later to become

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(*) Gourmont's 'souvenirs du symbolisme' in his Promenades littéraires contain an interesting comment on the state of mind of the symbolist generation. Speaking of "l'état d'esprit des symbolistes et de leur attitude intellectuelle vis-à-vis de la lourdeur naturaliste, optimiste si grossièrement", he writes: "Réellement, on voulait n'importe quoi, excepté des peintures satisfaites de la condition présente [...]." And Gourmont adds - words more indicative of his own and his contemporaries' state of mind than of historical reality: "C'est ainsi dans toutes les révolutions, qu'elles soient politiques ou littéraires, et ce n'est pas tant le désir du mieux qui les détermine que le besoin du nouveau." (Promenades litt., III, Mercure de France, 1963, p. 143.)

Lutèce), one of the hatching-beds of both 'decadence' and 'symbolism', proclaimed with deliberate provocation in an editorial of 1882:

> Nous ne croyons pas à l'utilité. Nous l'avouons ingénument: détruire nous embarrasserait, car nous n'avons rien à mettre à la place de ce qui est. Et peut-être est-il bon que les choses aillent mal.[...] Nous sommes anti-sociaux. Notre désir, notre rêve à nous, serait d'échapper à cette société détestable où nous sommes.(9)

A further sign of this disaffection can be seen also in the decline, amongst the intellectuals of France in the years after 1870, of patriotic or nationalist sentiment. Renan's words to Déroulède in the aftermath of the events of 1870-71 - "Jeune homme, la France se meurt, ne troublez pas son agonie" - were widely known and quoted; perhaps Barrès had them in mind when he lamented in 1892: "Notre morale, notre religion, notre sentiment des nationalités sont choses écroulées"(10). The mid-1880's see the beginnings of a spate of anti-militaristic novels and tracts, many of them written out of a spirit of humanitarian indignation at the absurdities and monstrosities of militarism, but others born solely of a spirit of negation of existing values. The latter is the case in the sustained and at times fierce anti-militarism of Jarry; while Remy de Gourmont gave expression to a widely held sentiment in his scathing pamphlet Le Joujou patriotisme of 1891, when, in the face of demands by nationalists such as Déroulède for a war of revanche to win back the 'lost provinces' of Alsace-Lorraine, he haughtily asserted:

> Personnellement, je ne donnerais pas, en échange de ces terres oubliées, ni le petit doigt de ma main droite: il me sert à soutenir ma main, quand j'écris; ni le petit doigt de ma main gauche: il me sert à secouer la cendre de ma cigarette. [...] Il me [redacted]

> paraît qu'elle a duré assez longtemps la plaisanterie des deux petites soeurs esclaves, agenouillées dans leurs crêpes au pied d'un poteau de frontière, pleurant comme des génisses, au lieu d'aller traire leurs vaches. [...] nous nous ferons tuer avec un réel déplaisir. [...] S'il faut d'un mot dire nettement les choses, eh bien: - Nous ne sommes pas patriotes. (11)

Today this may seem mild enough; but Gourmont's tone of irony and sarcasm, his description of patriotism as a 'virus' and "la sottise suprême", were deliberately intended to provoke his contemporaries - and provoke them he did, losing as a consequence of this pamphlet his post at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Yet even the patriotism of a Déroulède, for all its cheapness and nasty sabre-rattling, represents the affirmation of values of some kind (as Barrès was later to come to realise); the absence of such an affirmation constituted, amongst the intellectuals of the time, a further ideological void.

The literature of these years sees also a widespread expression of the theme of the 'outsider'. One of the major themes of the poetry of Laforgue is that of the man cut off from the world around him, alienated from the bourgeois society in whose midst he finds himself, by his own thought. The very title of Barrès' first novel - Sous l'oeil des Barbares - indicates its underlying theme of the radical opposition between the 'self' of its sensitive, intellectual hero and 'the barbarians' - defined as all those who possess a conception of life different from his own. A similar feeling of being an 'outsider' and a 'déraciné' is to be found in men as diverse as the young Claudel and Maurras, to say nothing of Jarry. The attitude of many such men - perhaps typified by Jarry - frequently contains a paradoxical combin-

ation of a cult of aristocratic superiority with an identification with the down-and-outs of society and the 'enemies' of that society. Something of the latter element can be seen in the popularity of the rejuvenated Romantic myth of the poète maudit; small wonder that the hero of the 'decadent' generation is Baudelaire, seen as the supreme example of the artist in opposition to bourgeois society and refusing to write for that society(12). Whilst perhaps even more significant still is the concept found in several writers of this generation - a concept sometimes applied to themselves - of 'les prolétaires intellectuels'(*).

There is a direct relationship between such attitudes as these and the aestheticism of the 1880's and 1890's: 'decadence' and aestheticism are in fact both manifestations of the same fundamental social malaise. Mallarmé politely but firmly refused to pay the slightest attention to 'la foule', taking refuge in the face of the charge of obscurity in the haughty assertion: "Je préfère, devant l'agression, rétorquer que des contemporains ne savent pas lire"(13). The aim of the 'decadent' poets of the mid-1880's - superbly satirized in the Déliquescences of 'Adoré Floupette'(14) - was to invent

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(*) Cf. the critic Henry Bérenger [who also uses the term in a wider sense] on a large part of the student population of Paris: "Mal logés, mal vêtus, mal nourris, privés de leur famille, déracinés de leurs provinces, ballotés entre les bibliothèques et les brasseries de filles, dévorés d'ambition et de misère, inconsciemment humiliés par des camarades plus riches, ces dix mille étudiants pauvres, véritable embryon du prolétariat intellectuel, forment une légion singulière et inquiétante dans la jeunesse contemporaine." (Les Prolétaires intellectuels en France, ed. Henry BÉRENGER, Paris, Éditions de la Revue, 1901, p. 22). It is in this milieu, according to Bérenger, that many of the young bourgeois anarchists of the years 1892-94 were recruited.

an ultra-refined language not only as a vehicle to express ultra-refined impressions and sensations, but also because conventional poetic language was too intelligible, too much within the reach of the 'vulgar' and the 'profane'; hence the need to make language obscure. As Le Décadent of Anatole Baju provocatively defined its attitude in 1886:

> Peu nous importe que les foules ne nous comprennent pas. L'écrivain, soucieux de son art, doit faire abstraction de leur existence.(15)

Much of this is undoubtedly to be regarded as no more than youthful bravado and provocation. Yet a real seriousness does lie behind much of this expression of deliberate anti-social sentiment and of a sense of alienation from the values of society as a whole. Moreover, what is important here, in our attempt to trace some of the sources of the nihilism with which we are concerned, is less the 'objectively' judged historical reality - whether these young men can really be considered as 'uprooted', as 'outsiders' - than what they believed and felt to be the case(*). In this respect, one set of ideas is particularly worthy of attention, the widely held conception of the 'decadence' or 'disintegration' of contemporary society and the view of the place

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(*) A distinction must be drawn between 'déracinés' of the Right, so to speak, and others. Amongst those who express these sentiments are some who identify consciously with the aristocracy of a former age - an aristocracy which had since 1830 been deprived of any real political power. Their feeling of 'not belonging' in the France of 1880 and their hostility to the triumphant bourgeoisie derives, therefore, from a conviction of their own superiority and a belief that they have been deprived of their hereditary rights. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam offers the most striking example in the period with which we are concerned of such an attitude, although vestiges of the latter can be seen (from 1830 onwards) in innumerable castigations of the bourgeoisie and of existing bourgeois régimes for their 'mediocrity'. More significant, and of more interest to us, are those writers and intellectuals who do not identify (initially, at least) with any social class. / Cont.

of the artist in such a world.

The notion of 'decadence' in this period is a complex one, with ramifications in many different fields of thought. It involves a historical view of the 'decline' of modern Western civilisation, and of the French nation in particular, which itself derives in part from an organic conception of all civilisations as passing through a period of youth, of maturity, and finally of senility and decay. It involves the idea of 'degeneration', at once physical, spiritual and moral, in a civilisation finding itself in the latter state. And, arising out of this degeneration, it implies also a deliberate cult of the perverse and the artificial. All three elements are already present in the thought of Baudelaire, the hero of the 'decadent' generation, and go back in origin at least to Gautier and the reaction against the Rousseau school of romanticism(16). Other contributing factors were undoubtedly political and social disillusionments, a false analogy between nineteenth-century France and the Rome of the 'Decadence'(behind which again lies the enormous extent to which nineteenth-century French education was steeped in Latin culture), and the work of contemporary psycho-pathologists, neurologists and sociologists(17). By the 1880's this concept of modern 'decadence' was known to and embraced (often gleefully) by a whole generation of writers. It was given philosophical respectability by Paul

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(16) Cont. from previous page:
/ A distinction needs also to be made between those - such as Villiers - whose nostalgia for the values of a former age is 'natural' (a result of aristocratic birth), and those - such as Maurras - for whom belief in the virtues of the heirarchy and values of the <u>ancien régime</u> is an acquired position.

Bourget's analysis of the phenomenon in his Essais and Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine (1883 and 1885 in volume form(18)), a work which more than any other was responsible for the general acceptance of the idea. And it found its most significant literary expression in Huysmans' A rebours (1884), described by the 'Connétable' Barbey d'Aurevilly as "l'un des plus décadents que nous puissions compter parmi les livres décadents de ce siècle de décadence. [...] pour qu'un [...] livre comme celui de M. Huysmans pût germer dans une tête humaine, il fallait vraiment que nous fussions devenus ce que nous sommes, - une race à sa dernière heure"(19). Huysmans' novel rapidly became the breviary of the 'decadent' movement and the initiator of an immense flood of literature which combined a portrayal of the utmost refinements of sexual inversion with a farcical cult of artificiality and a perverted mysticism, and of which the fifteen-volume La Décadence latine of the 'Sâr' Péladan stands as an example to surpass all others. At the same time, taking their cue from Huysmans and from Verlaine's sonnet 'Langueurs', whose first line proclaimed: "Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence"(20), a number of young writers provocatively adopted the name of 'decadents'. The years which followed saw the foundation of two self-styled 'decadent' journals, Paul Adam's short-lived La Décadence and Anatole Baju's highly successful Le Décadent, whose first issue, in April 1886, proudly and splendidly proclaimed:

> Se dissimuler l'état de décadence où nous sommes arrivés serait le comble de l'insenséisme. Religion, moeurs, justice, tout décade [...] La société se désagrège sous l'action corrosive d'une civilisation déliquescente. (21)

The more superficial and frivolous manifestations of this belief in contemporary 'decadence' are of little interest here. But certain of its philosophical and social implications are important, and are shared by self-styled 'decadents', 'symbolists' and other literary groups alike(*). In no single work of the period are these implications more clearly stated than in Bourget's analysis of contemporary 'decadence' and 'pessimism' in his two volumes of Essais de psychologie contemporaine, and it is to this analysis therefore that we can most usefully turn. Behind the 'decadent' cult of perversion and artificiality lies that crisis which we have already discussed in philosophical and ethical thought based upon the concept of nature - a crisis diagnosed by Bourget in the terms:

(*) In this respect, as also in many others, there is a fundamental identity between the so-called 'decadent' writers of the 1880's and their 'symbolist' contemporaries and successors. The attempt by critics such as Guy Michaud in his monumental Message poétique du symbolisme (cf. in particular Part II: La Révolution poétique) to present the two groups as complementary opposites - the first a 'negative' phenomenon, expressing the lamentations of a spiritual 'void', the latter 'positive', bringing a spiritual fulfilment - is an attempt to fly in the face of history. The two terms were used, often indiscriminately, by contemporaries in reference to both groups together. It was Jean Moréas who first proposed the term 'symbolisme' in an article of 11 August 1885 in Le XIXe siècle, following the success of 'Adoré Floupette's' satirical Les Déliquescences. But according to Remy de Gourmont, little attention was paid to the exact meaning of the new term, and in any case "l'épithète de décadent prévalut longtemps et eut même son heure de gloire avec La Décadence et avec le Décadent, surtout, qui semble un instant avoir centralisé le nouveau mouvement littéraire" (Promenades littéraires, III, p.160). Cf. also Gourmont's comments on the importance of Le Décadent and on Moréas own desertion of the term he had launched: the former publication was "une petite gazette qui fut un temps, au milieu des risées, le seul et véridique organe de la nouvelle tendance littéraire. Au vingt-cinquième numéro du Décadent, presque tous y écrivaient, qui avaient ou devaient se faire un nom symboliste. C'est le moment où les deux épithètes luttent pour la suprématie. Moréas lui-même abdique celle qu'il a créée et se rallie au Décadent, avec Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laforgue, Gustave Kahn, René Ghil, Jean Lorrain, /

> lentement, sûrement, s'élabore la croyance à la banqueroute de la nature, qui promet de devenir la foi sinistre du XXe siècle, si la science ou une invasion de barbares ne sauvent pas l'humanité trop réfléchie de la lassitude de sa propre pensée.(22)

Whilst behind many other ramifications of the idea of decadence lies a widespread belief in the progressive disintegration of contemporary society. Here again, Bourget is the most eloquent (though by no means first) spokesman for the concept. According to Bourget, "Par le mot de décadence,on désigne volontiers l'état d'une société qui produit un trop grand nombre d'individus impropres aux travaux de la vie commune"(23). Society is an organism, whose proper functioning requires the coordination and harmony of all its parts - the opposite of disintegration and anarchy(*); the latter is

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(*) The biological analogies do not stop here. An unavowed but persistent strain of popular Darwinism is also present in Bourget's thought. Cf.: "Une société ne subsiste qu'à la condition d'être capable de lutter vigoureusement pour l'existence dans la concurrence des races. Il faut qu'elle produise beaucoup d'enfants robustes et qu'elle mette sur pied beaucoup de braves soldats."(Essais de psychologie contemporaine, Lemerre, 2e éd. 1885, p.26). Then follows the inevitable analogy with the 'decadence' of Rome, in which the will thus to struggle was lost, leading to "l'entente savante du plaisir, le scepticisme délicat, l'énervement des sensations, l'inconstance du dilettantisme", which "ont été les plaies sociales de l'empire romain, et seront en tout autre cas des plaies sociales destinées à miner le corps tout entier" (ibid., p. 26).

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/ Stuart Merrill et le vieux Barbey d'Aurevilly [...]." (Promenades litt., III, p. 165).

Cf. also inter alia Gustave KAHN, Symbolistes et décadents, Vanier, 1902; Noël RICHARD, A l'aube du symbolisme: Hydropathes, Fumistes et Décadents, Nizet, 1961, and Le Mouvement décadent, Nizet, 1968.

On the near-meaninglessness of the term 'symbolism' - a complete misnomer from the start - cf. A. G. LEHMANN, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895. In the present thesis, the terms 'symbolism' and 'symbolists' are used in the broad sense which the words had acquired by the early 1890's, to refer to this whole generation of 'anti-naturalist', 'modernist' writers.

the state of modern civilisation, or at least the direction in which it is moving. Both the Essais and the Nouveaux essais, in fact, are penetrated by a fatalistic sense of a civilisation moving towards a state of disintegration and collapse, because its common ethical and metaphysical (or religious) bases have been or are being undermined. Out of this 'decadence' or disintegration, and a direct result of the destruction of beliefs wrought by the development of science and philosophy, there arises an attitude of 'dilettantism' which replaces action(24). A definition of this dilettantism is the chief object of Bourget's essay on Renan:

> Sur le tard seulement de la vie des races et quand l'extrême civilisation a peu à peu aboli la faculté de créer, pour y substituer celle de comprendre, le dilettantisme révèle toute sa poésie [...].(25)

The supreme example of this 'poetry' is Renan; no other writer of his generation, according to Bourget, professed to the same degree "des idées au-dessus des préjugés comme en dehors des lois ordinaires, et la théorie du détachement sympathique à l'égard des objets de la passion humaine"(26). Yet despite the author's attempts to defend Renan of the charges of pyrrhonism and negation and despite his account of the subtlety of Renan's 'dialectic'(*), it is obvious that for Bourget himself such an attitude of 'dilettantism' both arises from, and ultimately results in, intellectual

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(*) According to Bourget, Renan is not a "négatif", not "un homme qui arrive au doute par impossibilité d'étreindre une certitude. C'est bien plutôt qu'il étreint trop de certitudes. La légitimité de beaucoup de points de vue/contradictoires l'obsède et l'empêche de prendre cette position de combat qui nous paraît la seule façon d'affirmer la vérité [...]. Mais c'est précisément ce qui fait du dilettantisme une sorte de dialectique d'un genre nouveau, grâce à laquelle l'intelligence participe à l'infinie fécondité des choses." (Essais de psychologie contemporaine, p. 65).

impotence: it arises from the impossibility of concluding, of choosing, and results in a 'laissez-faire' attitude which is merely a resignation to nihilism.

In a society in such a state of disintegration, moreover, it is the artist and the intellectual in particular who are "malhabiles à l'action privée ou publique" because they are "trop habiles à la pensée solitaire [...] leur intélligence trop cultivée les a débarrassés des préjugés, et [...] ayant fait le tour des idées, ils sont parvenus à cette équité suprême qui légitime toutes les doctrines en excluant tous les fanatismes"(27). They are thus cut off from the world around them by the fact and the consequences of their own thought. Whilst at the same time, in such a society in which the various parts of the organism are ceasing to function in terms of the whole, art is at worst useless and parasitic, at best merely the distraction of a hyper-refined minority. To the argument that such "littératures de décadence" can lead nowhere, serve no purpose - "Elles aboutissent à des altérations de vocabulaire, à des subtilités de mots qui rendent le style inintelligible aux générations à venir"(28) -, the "théoriciens de la décadence" will reply, according to Bourget: "Qu'importe? [...] Le but de l'écrivain est-il de se poser en perpétuel candidat devant le suffrage universel des siècles? Nous nous délectons dans ce que vous appelez nos corruptions de style, et nous délectons avec nous les raffinés de notre race et de notre heure."(29).

As for Bourget's own attitude towards this 'decadence', it is on the surface that of a refusal to take sides: "Les deux points de vue sont légitimes." But in fact his

sympathies for the 'dilettantism' and his acquiescence in the 'decadence' and 'nihilism' which he describes are, here at least, unmistakable. If the progress of science and philosophy, coupled with an excess of 'thought' or 'analysis' generally, is leading to the general collapse of all past beliefs and faiths, to the despair of the human intellect, to the discovery of the 'néant' of all things, and to the 'détraquement' of nerves and mental health, such a situation produces also the most delicate and refined flowering of 'art' the world has ever yet seen:

> Si les citoyens d'une décadence sont inférieurs comme ouvriers de la grandeur du pays, ne sont-ils pas très supérieurs comme artistes de l'intérieur de leur âme? (30)

And in face of the impending doom of Western civilisation, the attitude of the aesthete is one of a nihilistic resignation; as the conclusion to Bourget's first volume puts it:

> Les Orientaux disent souvent: Quand la maison est prête la mort entre... - Que cette visiteuse inévitable trouve du moins notre maison, à nous, parée de fleurs!(31)(*)

This concept of the 'decadence' or disintegration of contemporary society accentuates, in the case of a number of young men (of whom Laforgue - a good disciple of Bourget in this respect - is here a typical example), an already existing

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(*) At one point in Bourget's Essais there is even a curious vision of a rampage of destruction by men driven to despair by their discovery of this philosophical void: "Il est probable que devant la banqueroute finale de la connaissance scientifique, ces âmes tomberaient dans un désespoir comparable à celui qui aurait saisi Pascal s'il eût été privé de la foi. Le grand trou noir [sic] [...] s'ouvrirait devant elles, à jamais noir et à jamais vide. Des révoltes éclateraient alors, tragiques et telles qu'aucune époque n'en aurait connu de pareilles. [...] Il n'y aurait rien d'étonnant à ce qu'une secte de nihilistes s'organisât en des temps pareils, possédée d'une rage de destruction dont peuvent seuls avoir l'idée ceux qui ont connu les affres de l'agonie métaphysique." (op. cit., pp. 94-95. My italics.)

At the same time, however, and alongside this youthful /

sense of separation from the world around them - one of the sources of their nihilism (it also serves in part to rationalise the would-be 'opting out' of almost the whole symbolist generation). The same concept of 'decadence', as outlined by Bourget, also in part explains the extreme artistic individualism, the deliberate cult of novelty for its own sake, of both decadents and symbolists. Gourmont, in fact, in his preface to Le Livre des Masques of 1896, defines 'symbolism' as simply "l'expression de l'individualisme dans l'art"(32); whilst three years earlier, in his essays on 'idealism', he had explicitly equated 'symbolism' and 'anarchism': "le Symbolisme [...] se traduit littéralement par le mot Liberté et, pour les violents, par le mot Anarchie"(33).(*)

(*) This 'symbolism' is also, of course, for Gourmont "l'expression esthétique de l'idéalisme" (L'Idéalisme (1893), in Le Chemin de Velours, Paris, 1902, p. 237). And in the same set of essays he explicitly establishes a relationship between 'idealism' and 'anarchism': "La relativité de l'extérieur étant bien établie, nul besoin, théoriquement, pour le moi, de se mêler à de problématiques contingences; il se suffit à lui-même [...]; l'idéaliste se désintéresse de toutes les relativités telles que la morale, la patrie, la sociabilité, les traditions, la famille, la procréation, ces notions reléguées dans le domaine pratique. [...] l'idéaliste ne saurait donc admettre qu'un seul type de gouvernement, l'anarchie"(ibid., pp. 215-216). The same idea is taken up again a year later and further developed in an essay of Feb. 1894: Gourmont claims that "poussée à son extrême, la théorie idéaliste aboutissait, en mes déductions, pratiquement, au néronisme ou au fakirisme [...]; socialement [...], au despotisme ou à l'anarchie" ('Dernière conséquence de l'idéalisme', in La Culture des idées, Paris, s.d., p. 258).

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/ flirtation with 'decadence' and nihilism, the seeds of Bourget's subsequent political and social evolution are also apparent in his aristocratic hatred and fear of, and contempt for, 'la foule', 'le peuple'. Whilst to some extent also one might describe this subsequent evolution as the result of a reaction - in the literal sense - on the part of Bourget himself against his own youthful tendencies.

Such an identification is far from gratuitous: the symbolist generation as a whole manifests not only an extreme anarchistic individualism(*), but also, in the early 1890's, a marked and open sympathy for the 'enemies of society', the anarchists and bomb-throwing terrorists of those years. The young Léon Blum had even concluded his survey of the 'apoliticism' of contemporary intellectuals with the assertion:

> Ce qui est certain, c'est que l'Apolitique a rompu le lien entre l'individu et la société, et par cela même l'individu s'est persuadé qu'un lien quelconque avec une société quelconque lui était pesant et superflu. [...] De cette considération on peut conclure que l'avenir, en France du moins, appartient [...] à l'anarchie.(34)

The fiery Octave Mirbeau gave violent expression to a widespread feeling when he declared:

> On n'améliore pas la société, on la supprime.[...] La société est un mensonge, le progrès social un leurre. Le pacte social est rompu, il n'existe plus que l'individu, son tempérament, sa loi, sa conscience, sa volonté.(35)

The young Claudel did not demur when contemporaries gave an 'anarchist' interpretation to his first play, Tête d'Or. Barrès in 1893 published an 'anarchist' novel, L'Ennemi des lois, described by contemporary critics as a "credo d'anarchisme intellectuel" and its hero as "le plus parfait type littéraire d'anarchiste d'idée"(36); and in his train Zola, J.-H. Rosny and Paul Adam all portray, with varying degrees of sympathy, young anarchists in their novels(37).

(*) It is possible that after 1890 the influence of Nietzsche also plays a part in some cases in this anarchistic individualism. Nietzsche became gradually known in France from 1890 onwards, through a number of articles in literary and philosophical reviews for that year, and through the translation of his works by Henri Albert between 1890 and 1906.

In May 1893 the symbolist La Plume devoted a special issue to 'L'Anarchie'(38). Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, under the direction of Francis Viélé-Griffin, became overtly anarchist in sympathy and tendency in 1892, publishing inédits of Bakunin and Max Stirner, and extracts from the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels side by side with inédits of Laforgue (other inédits of Laforgue were published at the same time in the Revue Anarchiste!)(39); contributors to Les Entretiens in these years include Paul Valéry, Paul Adam, Henri de Régnier, Gourmont, Mallarmé, Pierre Quillard, and the anarchist theoreticians Elie and Elisée Reclus(40). The Revue Blanche in the early 1890's became the repository of a ferment of anarchist ideas; whilst the man who was to be its editor-in-chief a few years later, Félix Fénéon, described by Mallarmé (who testified in court on his behalf) as "un des critiques les plus subtils et les plus aigus que nous ayons"(41), was arrested and put on trial in the celebrated 'Procès des Trente' of August 1894, along with eighteen other anarchist theoreticians and propagandists and eleven common thiefs claiming to justify their deeds in the name of 'Anarchy'!(42) Whilst the most radical of all such reviews was L'Endehors of Zo d'Axa, which counted among its contributors Emile Verhaeren, Saint-Pol-Roux, Octave Mirbeau, Camille Mauclair, Victor Barrucand, Georges Lecomte, Lucien Descaves, Tristan Bernard and Paul Adam(43), and the meaning of whose title was defined by its editor as: "Celui que rien n'enrôle et qu'une impulsive nature guide seule, ce passionnel tant complexe, ce hors la loi, ce hors d'école, cet isolé [...]"(44); for the first six months of 1892 alone

contributors to the review between them incurred prison sentences totalling seven years and four months, and fines totalling 13,150 francs!(45).

At the same time, several young writers published open apologies of the activities of anarchist terrorists such as Ravachol, Vaillant and Emile Henry. Between 1892 and 1894, Paris shook with fear as one terrorist bomb-attack followed another. The greatest shocks were produced by those of Ravachol in 1892, then of Vaillant and Henry, at only a few weeks interval, in 1893 and 1894; after the assassination by the Italian Caserio of the President of the Republic, Sadi Carnot, in 1894, the severity of the so-called lois scélérates, hastily passed by a terrified Assembly, succeeded in stamping out the wave of violence. These anarchists were men of theories as well as acts, inspired by the works of Bakunin and Kropotkin and, in particular in France, of Elisée Reclus and above all Jean Grave, who used their trials to publicize those theories. But although such theories were rarely more than sketchily known amongst members of the literary community, their 'active propagandists' aroused numerous expressions of sympathy. Paul Adam wrote an Éloge de Ravachol in 1892, and similar articles were written by Marcel Schwob and Pierre Quillard (both soon to become friends of Jarry). Eighteen months later, according to one observer of these years, "lors des procès Vaillant et Henry, les articles de Geffroy, Barrès, Kahn, Mirbeau créaient un mouvement de sympathie ou de tolérance en faveur des accusés"(46). Of these various articles, that of Adam is typical; far from being entitled to condemn Ravachol, it is

society itself, according to Adam, which stands condemned:

> Est-il, en effet, plus coupable [...] que la société, elle qui laisse périr dans la solitude des mansardes des êtres aussi utilisables que l'élève des Beaux-Arts naguère trouvé mort à Paris, faute de pain. La société tue plus que les assassins [...].(47)

Indeed, Ravachol is even a martyr, a Saint, implicitly identified with Christ himself:

> Ravachol reste bien le propagateur de la grande idée des religions anciennes qui préconisèrent la recherche de la mort individuelle pour le Bien du monde; l'abnégation de soi, de sa vie et de sa renommée pour l'exaltation des pauvres, des humbles.[...]
> En ce temps de cynisme et d'ironie, un Saint nous est né.
> Son sang sera l'exemple où s'abreuveront de nouveaux courages et de nouveaux martyrs.(48)

In fact, the deeds of Ravachol - who had resorted also to robbery and murder - aroused some criticism even in anarchist milieux; but the action of Auguste Vaillant in throwing a bomb into the crowded Chambre des Députés on 9 December 1893 - a Chamber discredited on all sides by a series of scandalous revelations, culminating in the Panama scandal of 1892-93 - was greeted in both anarchist and literary milieux with universal approbation. Few statements convey better the 'moral atmosphere' of these years in literary and intellectual circles than the flamboyant and provocative declaration of Laurent Tailhade, asked for his impression of Vaillant's deed:

> Qu'importent les victimes si le geste est beau?
> Qu'importe la mort de quelques vagues humanités
> si, par elle, s'affirme l'individu?(49)(*)

Such a statement goes beyond mere sympathy with 'anarchism' to the expression of an aesthetic individualism that is

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(*) By an irony of fate, Tailhade was himself to be the victim of such terrorist acts: he lost an eye when a bomb exploded in the restaurant Foyot on 4 April 1894.

wholly nihilistic. Small wonder, perhaps, that the symbolists almost to a man applauded frantically when Jarry in 1896 hurled his mixture of anarchism and sheer nihilism - in the person of Ubu - in the face of the bourgeois public.

There is, of course, an element of youthful bravado in many of these declarations. Whilst at the same time, just as the actions of many terrorists were motivated by a vision of a future utopia of equality and fraternity beyond the 'Grand Soir' of destruction, so too the violent negations of many of these angry young men of letters is born of a generous indignation at the existing state of society and of a (very understandable) revulsion against the corruption of contemporary political life: the examples of Mirbeau, Tailhade and Adam, all of them quoted above, are cases in point. No doubt, too, in part, the literary 'anarchism' of the 1890's was no more than, as Edmond Jaloux put it, "un moyen violent pour les symbolistes d'affirmer un individualisme farouche, hostile à la société et à ses règles"(50). Yet this very hostility on the part of these writers and intellectuals to the bourgeois society in whose midst they found themselves and to its values, which was to cause some amongst them to turn to a gradual espousal of the cause of the working class and of socialism, and others to look back beyond the bourgeois Republic to an espousal of 'traditional' values, in others again produced only a sense of alienation, a sense of being further cut off from the society out of whose midst they sprang coupled with an inability to identify with any other social group and its values. The motives behind the act of an Emile Henry - who as a young bourgeois

intellectual himself aroused particular interest and sympathy - in throwing a bomb at random into a crowded café, are to be found less in a hope of future regeneration than in a simple nihilistic despair, an aristocratic contempt "aussi bien pour les puissants que pour la multitude qu'il jugeait vile et lâche"(51). Of how many of his sympathizers is the same true? The review L'Endehors goes beyond a defence of anarchist theory and 'propagande par le fait' to the expression of a wholly nihilistic individualism. How many of its contributors would have agreed with the following nihilistic 'profession of faith' published in its pages? -

> Nous allons - individuels, sans la Foi qui sauve et qui aveugle. Nos dégoûts de la Société n'engendrent pas en nous d'immuables convictions. Nous nous battons pour la joie des batailles et sans rêve d'avenir meilleur. Que nous importent les lendemain qui seront dans des siècles! Que nous importent les petits neveux! C'est en dehors de toutes les lois, de toutes les règles, de toutes les théories - même anarchistes - c'est dès l'instant, dès tout de suite que nous voulons nous laisser aller à nos pitiés, à nos emportements, à nos douceurs, à nos rages, à nos instincts - avec l'orgueil d'être nous-mêmes.(52)

Once again, such a quotation helps to convey vividly the 'moral atmosphere' - or one important element of that atmosphere - of these years. The 'anarchism' of many writers and intellectuals of the time - Jarry pre-eminent amongst them - is not born of any dream of regeneration on the other side of the holocaust , but is the expression solely of a nihilistic individualism and of a nihilistic hatred of all existing social forms and values, of a desire only for destruction. Far from being, as has been frequently claimed, a 'stranger to his era', Jarry is only too typically a product of that era, one element of the moral atmosphere of which is summed up in Ubu's splendidly terse self-characterisation: "Quand j'aurai pris toute la Phynance, je tuerai tout le monde et je m'en irai"(53).

Chapter VI: REFERENCES.

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(5) Promenades littéraires, tome III, Mercure de France, 1963, p. 151.

(6) L'Ecole décadente, Vanier, 1887, pp. 9, 7-8, 10.

(7) 'Les Progrès de l'Apolitique en France', La Revue Blanche, 1 July 1892, pp. 18-19. The article is dedicated to Maurice Barrès.

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(36) The latter phrase comes from M.-A. LEBLOND (pseud.), La Société française sous la Troisième République d'après les romanciers contemporains, Paris, Alcan, 1905, p. 239.

(37) Cf. LEBLOND, op. cit., pp. 199 ff. The author cites Zola's Paris, Rosny's Les Ames perdues, and Adam's Le Mystère des Foules (1893).

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(40) According to Jean MAITRON, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914), Paris, Société universitaire d'éditions et de librairie, 1955, p.141.

(41) Cit. Maitron, op. cit., p. 241.

(42) Cf. ibid., pp. 237-246 'Le Procès des Trente. Fin d'une époque'.

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(44) Cit. MAITRON, op. cit., p. 131, Note.

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(46) LEBLOND, La Société française sous la Troisième République..., pp. 196-197.

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(52) Cit. ibid., p. 131, Note. From Zo d'AXA, Endehors, Choix d'articles, Paris, Chamuel, 1896, pp. 123-4.

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Chapter VII: JEAN LAHOR (HENRI CAZALIS).

(i) Introduction.

The Parnassian poet Henri Cazalis (1840-1909) - who wrote under the name of Jean Lahor - is remembered today chiefly as a friend and correspondent of the young Mallarmé. The reason is not surprising: his verse must be rated as generally banal, whilst even as a thinker he lacks any striking originality. Yet his thought is of great interest in the context of the present thesis in that it presents a typical reaction to many of the leading philosophical, and especially scientific, ideas of the age.

Cazalis was born into a solidly bourgeois background, his father being a practising physician who wished his son to take over his practice. At his mother's wish, however, he began to study law, eventually obtaining his doctorate at Strasbourg. Family connections found him a job with a Paris lawyer for some years, but in 1865, on the death of his mother, Cazalis went back to his studies, this time to medicine, whilst also finding the opportunity to travel and to write. Early literary efforts were Vita tristis (1865) and Melancholia (1868). The events of 1870-71 - at least according to Cazalis himself - shattered this idyllic existence and plunged him into a deep pessimism. The war destroyed his former intense admiration for German culture, determining a profound aversion henceforth for all things German. While the Commune provoked in him the typical self-defensive reaction of the French bourgeois; his work after 1871 displays an increasing contempt for and fear of 'la foule' and an almost fanatical anti-democratic bias(*).

(*) E.g. he speaks of "la poussée de cette barbarie nouvelle sortie de la démagogie", and of "cette barbarie qui monte". / Cont.

The war over, Cazalis returned to his medical studies and to the depression of the operating theatre, where he witnessed daily "le spectacle de la souffrance et de la mort"(1). In 1875 the eternal student finally took up a career, and henceforth, secure in his domestic life - in 1876 he had married the daughter of a Paris lawyer -, Cazalis' existence was to be divided between his literary activity and his medical and social work.

Four works amongst the literary production of Jean Lahor are of particular interest here: Le Livre du Néant (1872), philosophical meditations and prose-poems; L'Illusion (1875), verse; an enlarged edition of L'Illusion, subtitled 'Poésies complètes' (1888); and La Gloire du Néant (1896), prose-poems and meditations incorporating much of the volume of 1872. Despite the chronological distance between the first and last of these works, a basic unity of inspiration runs through all of them. All display a fundamental preoccupation with a particular view of the world - namely, a theoretical nihilism - and with an attempt to escape from certain of its conclusions.(*)

Lahor's thought can be divided, for the purposes of

(*) Other works of a literary nature include an Histoire de la littérature hindoue (1888), Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste et le pessimisme héroïque (1906, a sort of personal catechism), and a volume of Oeuvres choisies prepared by the author and published posthumously. In addition, Cazalis published under his own name a series of pamphlets of a medical or social-reformist nature.

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/ (Notes et fragments biographiques, in Oeuvres choisies, ed. S. ROCHEBLAVE, Paris, 1909, pp. xli, xlvi). So extreme is Lahor's reaction that he is led to a wholesale condemnation of the Revolution and all its ideals, his own political ideal being a new aristocracy.

exposition, into three stages: (i) his philosophy of 'le néant' and universal 'illusion'; (ii) the elaboration, in an attempt to escape from certain logical consequences of this nihilism, of an 'As if' philosophy; (iii) his final solution, the doctrine of 'pessimisme héroïque' or 'nihilisme héroïque' (*). This division, however, is not a clear-cut chronological one, the various stages often co-existing at any given moment.

(i) <u>The philosophy of 'le néant' and of universal 'illusion'</u>.

Although brought up in the Catholic faith by a very pious mother, Lahor appears to have lost this faith around 1865, with the death of his mother and the beginning of his scientific studies. It was replaced, he claimed, by a pantheistic philosophy which in turn gave way to one of nihilism (2). But this order of events is suspect. Writing towards the end of his life, and adopting increasingly Indian modes of thought, Lahor wished future generations to see in his own thought the same evolution as he perceived in Indian thought - from pantheism to nihilism. In fact, almost all his pantheistic poems date from the years after 1875. A glance at the nature of this pantheistic view of the world, however, is revealing. Though dressed up in the most exotic Oriental robes, its basis is to be found in a materialistic monism imported from Germany and clearly owing much to the school of Büchner and Haeckel; it is based on "ces deux vérités de la Science nouvelle: l'idée de l'unité de force et l'idée de l'unité de substance" (3)(*).

(*) The confusion between 'pessimism' and 'nihilism' runs through the whole of Lahor's work. Most of the time, for him, the two terms are synonymous.

(*) A passage in <u>La Gloire du Néant</u> - not in <u>Le Livre du Néant</u> of 1872 - contains an invocation, reminiscent of the two German materialist philosophers, of a pantheistically conceived universal force or energy.

cont./

Along with large numbers of his contemporaries, Lahor sees European philosophy since Kant as a process of increasing collapse, resulting in "la désespérance moderne où nous a jeté la ruine de tous les systèmes théologiques ou métaphysiques"(4). More important than pure philosophy, however, it is from the concepts of contemporary science and scientifically-based philosophical doctrines that Lahor deduces his philosophy of nihilism. It is necessary to emphasize the scientific origins of this view of the world against the extravagant claims of the author of at least one work on Lahor concerning the Indian inspiration of his thought(*). There can be no dispute of Lahor's knowledge of Indian religious thought and literature(**), nor of the

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(*) R. PETITBON, L'Influence de la pensée religieuse indienne dans le romantisme et le Parnasse. Jean Lahor, and Les Sources orientales de Jean Lahor, Paris, Nizet, 1962. Certain of the claims made by the author are little short of ridiculous: after 1871, Lahor "se convertit [...] à une foi indienne syncrétique et se maintient dans cette foi" (Jean Lahor, p. 125); "A partir de 1888, la plupart des modes de pensée et jusqu'aux réactions sensorielles de Lahor seront d'un Indien" (ibid., p. 127); "Lahor, qui ne pense plus qu'indien" (ibid., p. 202); and so on. Moreover, there are numerous contradictions in Petitbon's arguments, and elsewhere in the work he admits the predominance of the scientific origins of Lahor's thought. Despite these criticisms, however, the work has considerable value, as the best study of Lahor to date and the only major study to have appeared within recent decades.

(**) Although Petitbon himself quotes the Indian scholar Louis Renou in a reference to Lahor as "auteur d'une littérature hindoue écrite avec plus de lyrisme que de compétence" (Les Sources orientales de Jean Lahor, p. 10).

Cont. from previous page:
/ "Force universelle, toi qui animes et qui meus la matière, toi dont l'activité, la passion incessante, se manifestent en des apparences si diverses, en mouvement, en électricité, en lumière, dans la danse des mondes ou celle des atomes, dans le flux et le reflux des êtres [...], ô Force universelle." (1896, p. 32).

importance of oriental themes and imagery in his poetry. But though he uses the latter to illustrate his ideas, his acceptance of these themes and images is conditional upon their agreement with the findings of modern science. This is particularly true of his 'adherence' to the doctrines of Buddhism, in which he claims to find "la première formule philosophique du nihilisme", adding that "aucun nihilisme n'aura dépassé celui du Bouddha"(5).

> Des religions du passé, la doctrine bouddhique est celle qui semble en réalité le moins en antagonisme avec la science actuelle. Sur l'éternité de la substance et de la force, sur le mouvement universel qui emporte, crée et détruit toutes choses, sur la grande loi de correspondance entre la cause et l'effet, qui est la loi même de l'évolution [...], le bouddhisme professe des doctrines à peu près identiques à celles de la science. Il est d'accord avec le pessimisme scientifique de Darwin.(6)

The particular branches of this science whose impact is greatest on the thought of Lahor are: the mechanistic materialism of contemporary physics and chemistry; contemporary physiology; astronomy; and Darwinisn evolutionism. Three primary notions make up his philosophy of 'le néant': the absence of finality in the universe; the wretchedness and apparent worthlessness of human existence; and the 'illusoriness' of all values by which we try to shape our existence, and even of the physical universe in which we live.

The idea of the absence of finality in the universe runs through the whole of Lahor's work. Where an Edmond Scherer could in 1861 still express a belief in the existence of 'immanent laws' and in a 'universal reason' governing all the movements of the cosmos, Lahor is haunted by the idea of the purposelessness and contingency of all this activity. Astronomy has revealed to him a universe of incalculable

dimensions which presents merely the spectacle of a "tourbillon fou". Sometimes this idea is dressed up in the imagery of Eastern religions: the world is but "un jeu, un amusement de la pensée d'Allah"(7). More telling is the expression of the same idea in the language of science:

> Des forces et des formes, voilà le grand Tout; les forces n'ayant d'autre but que la métamorphose des formes, la naissance, la tuerie des êtres.(8)

In a phrase Lahor is fond of quoting: "au commencement était la démence"(9).

Within this metaphysical framework, human existence is felt to be equally senseless; the conviction of the absence of finality in the world broadens into a strongly melodramatic or emotional sense of the 'absurdity' of all being - or of what Lahor calls "le sens vrai de la vie"(*). The revelation by astronomy of the immensity of the universe, which for Lahor only emphasizes the utter insignificance of

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(*) The sense of the 'absurd' is as fully developed in the writings of Lahor as in those of the early Camus. In fact, almost the whole of Le Mythe de Sisyphe is contained in the work of Lahor, written some forty to sixty years beforehand. This is not of course to accuse Camus of plagiarism, but merely to point out that the particular phenomenon with which he is concerned in his early work - a consciousness of living in an 'absurd' world - did not need to wait until the inter-war period to make its appearance on the European scene.

A similar emotionalism also pervades the work of both Camus and Lahor. The following melodramatic passage is reminiscent of parts of Sisyphe: "Quelques-uns pour avoir eu le sens vrai de la vie, quelques-uns ont cessé de vivre, se sont tués, ou sont devenus fous, - fous parce qu'ils étaient sages; à moins que consentant à ne plus penser ni voir, ils ne se soient remis à tourner, fauves tranquilles et résignés, dans la cage de l'existence humaine, ou qu'ils n'aient repris, bêtes de somme patientes et dociles, leur monotone et plat labeur quotidien." (La Gloire du Néant, 1896, pp. 31-32.)

this earth and its human inhabitants, adds to this sense, as also does a conviction of the ephemeralness of all phenomena: "Puisque ainsi tout se doit anéantir,/ Que sert-il de toujours créer et de bâtir?", he asks inelegantly(10). He is left with the Hegelian Becoming without the salvation of absolute Being; modern science has revealed to him

> que tout se transformait sans cesse, était dans un perpétuel devenir; que rien n'était stable, et que tout fuyait, se décomposait sans fin, n'apparaissait que pour disparaître et mourir. L'astronomie, cette science sublime, mais dont se doivent écarter ceux qui redoutent le vertige, me faisait également voir les astres à l'infini, les astres qu'on croyait éternels, soumis aux mêmes lois de l'évolution, et, dans leur tourbillon fou qui apparaît sans but, naissant et mourant comme nous.(11)

Within this whole, of course, the sense of human ephemeralness is predominant; a preoccupation with the idea of death runs through all Lahor's work, while the belief in immortality, though used sometimes for poetic effect, is more often presented as a mere dream of man (12). Again, it is contemporary science - in this instance, his own medical studies - which lies behind this development:

> L'analyse et l'expérience m'avaient fait voir très pareille au néant cette vie humaine, cette vie éphémère, si vaine en vérité, ou avilie par ce qui l'occupe, cette vie sans lendemain peut-être (car la pathologie me révélait l'infirmité de mon âme, que la maladie, la vieillesse amoindrissent, dégradent ou éteignent, simple phénomène contingent, comme la clarté de la lampe qui en ce moment m'éclaire) [...].(13)

A final contributing factor in this sense of absurdity is the idea of the indifference of 'nature' to man, a constant theme of Lahor's work. Banal as the idea may seem today, Lahor is echoing a common concern of his age, and the importance of this theme in his work serves to provide yet a further illustration of that crisis, discussed in an

earlier chapter, of philosophical thought based on the concept of 'nature'. At times Lahor's attitude is one of apparent amazement: nature is at once "douce et féroce", producing with equal indifference the man of genius - a Caesar or a Beethoven - and the poor deformed wretch, striking with equal savagery the noble-minded and the vulgar, the innocent and the guilty(14). At other times he displays a certain rancour, just as his laments on the absurdity of things reveal an element of rancour against a God who is not: men are the clowns of nature - "nous sommes tes bouffons, ô Nature, nous sommes les bouffons de ta cour"(15). And as with Schopenhauer, reaction against a former optimism causes him to assert the maleficence of nature: men are the victims of a cruel, cunning force. Whether there is a direct influence of the German philosopher on Lahor is difficult to say: La Gloire du Néant of 1896 discusses briefly Schopenhauer's views of the Will and of love(16), whilst several passages of Lahor's work seem to echo Schopenhauerian ideas on love and the sexual impulse; he stresses time and again the purely fortuitous link between sexual pleasure and reproduction, and agrees with Schopenhauer that nature has set out to lay a trap for man: "La Nature n'a peut-être créé la Beauté, que pour nous asservir davantage à la reproduction de l'espèce?"(17). But this was one of the ideas of the German philosopher most remarked upon in France, and even if an influence is to be postulated, there is no evidence at all that it is a direct one. Much more important than any possible influence of Schopenhauer is the certain influence of the theories of Darwin.

In the passionate debates that surrounded the theories of Darwin in France in the late 1860's and 1870's, Lahor unremittingly took the side of the Englishman; his autobiographical notes contain several explicit recognitions of his debt to Darwin, whilst an important poem in L'Illusion of 1875 is dedicated to him(18). The impact of the latter's ideas was twofold. Lahor was struck first and foremost by the concept of the struggle for survival which, to his mind, destroyed all concepts of good and of justice: "Avec Darwin [...] je constatais que la loi du plus fort dominait les rapports des êtres, et cette loi était contradictoire à l'idée de justice"(19). Elsewhere he states that the law of nature is "une loi d'injustice et de meurtre", the only 'right' existing in nature is "le droit de la force"(20). This recognition of failure to find any basis for morality in nature is the source of a "pessimisme scientifique", a pessimism - or nihilism - which, far from being merely a subjective point of view, is "la reconnaissance attristée des lois de la Nature"(21).

Secondly, the influence of the evolutionary theories of Darwin strengthened the mechanistic and physiological determinism of the German school which Lahor had adopted: man is firmly 'reintegrated into nature', in the words of Cournot, - that is, in this case, into a resolutely materialistic conception of the world. In the eyes of science, man was merely "un animal parmi les animaux", "[le] fils de la bête" and no longer "le fils de Dieu"(22). Mankind is a "troupeau de singes sorti des forêts"(23). "L'animal est toujours sous la peau humaine"(24) is a theme which

Lahor never tires of repeating. As such, man is subject to the same physiological determinism which rules the animal kingdom. Whilst as a material organism he is victim also of purely physio-chemical forces: Lahor's studies in physiology have shown that a mere change in the chemistry of the human body can "faire jaillir la joie ou la douleur, le rire ou les larmes, des actes sublimes ou grotesques, des vertus ou des crimes, des héroïsmes ou des lâchetés"(25). He asks rhetorically: "que sommes-nous, pour pouvoir être livrés ainsi, corps et âme, à la merci d'un atome?"(26).

From contemporary scientific doctrines Lahor has deduced a view of the world in which everything is absurdity or madness (or at best a "comédie effroyable"), in which the basis for all morality has been destroyed, and which emphasizes over and over again the 'animality' - the squalor and wretchedness -, and apparent worthlessness, of the vast majority of human lives. All values and ideals of man are declared to be merely 'illusions':

> Je crois de plus en plus que les grandes idées de justice, de vertu et même que l'idée de beauté sont des créations humaines, de généreux rêves du cerveau humain.(27)

Illusory, too, is the concept of a human personality or 'self' as a non-contingent unity. And at times there is even a suggestion that the physical world itself is an 'illusion' in some way:

> j'avais vu que l'Illusion, la Maya éternelle, nous leurrait sans cesse, que dans ce monde, par notre ignorance et de nous-mêmes et des choses, nous marchions le plus souvent comme des somnambules, des hallucinés ou des fous [...].(28)

Moreover, Lahor claims to have been himself haunted by a sense of the unreality of the world:

> Et j'avais vraiment, par instants, la vision ou la sensation d'un rêve infini, douloureux plutôt, et dont, rêve moi-même, je prenais un moment conscience: oui, par instants, je ne voyais plus les êtres, les choses, que sous un aspect fantômal [...]. Ces hallucinations hantèrent souvent ma pensée.(29)

Frequently the idea is given poetic expression in the terms of Lahor's 'pantheism': the world is but the dream of God, or Allah. But once again, its basis is to be found in contemporary scientific notions; Lahor's philosophy of universal 'illusion' derives from his studies in physiology: the senses are not only notoriously fallible, but human perceptions, like human behaviour, can be changed radically by a simple chemical change in the body or brain:

> Changez la nature du sang, vous changez l'état du cerveau. Hallucinations, folies furieuses ou douces, mélancolie et extase, ces phénomènes, vous les pouvez produire, et presque à volonté, si, dans le sang qui monte au cerveau, vous versez certaine nature et certaine dose de poison.(30)(*)

This philosophy of 'illusion', finally, is the counterpart to the fusion of nihilism and profound pessimism which constitutes Lahor's philosophy of 'le néant'. The world is at once a 'néant' and an 'illusion', "une folie" and "un fantôme sans réalité".

The extremity of Lahor's reaction is doubtless to be explained by several factors. His is a mind which concerns itself with abstract, metaphysical problems, often expressed in very emotional, imprecise language (hence such statements as: "Dès lors, toutes les parties du Tout ne me semblant

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(*) There is an obvious analogy between Lahor's philosophy of 'illusion' and the solipsism of the symbolists in the 1880's; the latter also derives to some extent, though indirectly, from developments in nineteenth-century psychology and brain-physiology. Something of an analogy exists also between Lahor's philosophy, with its physiological basis, and Remy de Gourmont's equation of 'materialism' and a (solipsistic) 'idealism' (Cf. chapter V, supra).

plus que néant, du néant de ses parties je concluais à celui du Tout"(31), and the question "si le néant n'était pas l'unique et la vraie réalité [sic]?"(32)). A more important factor is simply the shock of new ideas, and of disappointed expectations: he has searched for 'meaning' and been frustrated, has seen man thrown down from the rank of a son of God to that of a beast among beasts; a former vision of the world and of man has been shattered, former truth has become 'illusion'(*). It is this which causes an element of rancour to enter into Lahor's references to God and nature, and which even causes him to proclaim - in a manner reminiscent of the friend of his youth, Mallarmé - "le mensonge de tout"(33). These factors go a long way towards explaining the melodrama of much of Lahor's work (and indeed of much nineteenth-century reaction to the same problems or ideas). Nonetheless, his nihilism is the product for the most part of a logical deduction from certain premises, and his attempt to overcome that nihilism is perhaps even more interesting than the question of its origins.

(iii) The Elaboration of an 'As if' philosophy.

Faced with this 'néant', Lahor reacts in several different ways. At times, his attitude is one of defeatism:

(*) Cf. the melodramatic statement: "Jadis on avait Dieu, et l'espérance de la lumière, de la vie lumineuse au delà de la mort [...]. L'antique voile est tombé: pour fin de tout, c'est la tombe ignoble, la mort sans phrases." (Le Livre du Néant, pp. 43-44, La Gloire du Néant, pp. 37-38; Lahor's italics). The statement brings forth the even more melodramatic and would-be incredulous exclamation: "Et il y a encore des gens qui mangent, boivent, dorment et engendrent tranquillement!"

like the 'decadents' of the 1880's, he is afflicted by the sense of a world collapsing around him, as he sees first more and more of his contemporaries, and then future generations, coming to "le pessimisme et [le] nihilisme métaphysique" and foresees "les tristes siècles à venir" resigning themselves "aux mortels arrêts de la vérité implacable"(34). And in a passage in both Le Livre du Néant and La Gloire du Néant he contemplates the eventual and necessary extinction of life:

> Un jour certainement viendra où l'homme ne voudra plus procréer son espèce. A quoi bon? Pour prolonger la durée de cette infernale comédie, pour perpétuellement refaire ce travail de Sisyphe, remuer toujours cette boue et ce néant? (35)(*)

At the same time he advocates a retreat (as the symbolists will do) into a world of dream and of inner freedom:

> Où fuir? où se réfugier? - En soi-même. - L'homme, dans son âme, se peut créer un monde d'idées pures, qui le console du réel. Dans son âme, il est libre. Quelle puissance peut lui ravir cette liberté?(36)

Such a resignation to nihilism, however, is basically foreign to Lahor's active spirit, and he searches for some philosophy which will save mankind from the anguish of nihilism - "sauver en elle [l'humanité] la force et la vie morales"(37), and "recréer sa moralité et sa foi, - sa foi en elle, si ce n'est en Dieu"(38). The first phase in this reconstruction is a poetic acceptance and celebration of 'illusion'. Distinguishing between "le fond des choses" and their "surface", the poet attempts to close his eyes to the former and to see only the latter: "Le fond des choses est

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(*) Cf. also the poem 'La Mort du Soleil' in L'Illusion, 1888, pp. 190-1. The idea of the extinction of the sun arises also in La Gloire du Néant (p. 161). A similar theme was to be treated by Laforgue.

inquiétant; mais la surface nous rassure..."(39). Whence a poetic cult of "Maïa, Déesse de l'Illusion", with Lahor asking of his new-found goddess merely "de beaux mensonges, des illusions nouvelles d'amour, de justice et de vertu"(40).(*) And he even comes to bless this 'illusion' which he once denounced: "Je bénis tout ce qui m'a menti, l'illusoire beauté des choses [...]. Je bénis tout ce qui m'a trompé, tout ce qui m'a consolé d'<u>être</u>."(41)

Lahor is thus led to the formulation of a rigorously hedonistic (or, as he calls it, epicurean) philosophy. He himself admits that this 'epicureanism' is "celui d'un désespéré sans doute"(42); yet he claims - reminiscent of Camus in <u>Le Mythe de Sisyphe</u> - that such a philosophy makes for the living of life at a maximum of intensity; such a doctrine,

> loin de décourager de vivre [...], ne fait qu'exciter ceux qui aiment, à aimer davantage, ceux qui luttent, à lutter plus encore, ceux qui jouissent de leur cerveau ou de leur âme, à en multiplier et à en exalter les énergies [...].(43)

Perhaps even more significant is the hint of anti-intellectualism which enters this outlook; in <u>La Gloire du Néant</u>,

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(*) There is a striking similarity between the ideas, and even the very words, of Lahor here and the words of the young Mallarmé, writing to his friend in April, 1866, to describe his own 'discovery' of "le Néant", to which he came "sans connaître le Bouddhisme": "Oui, <u>je le sais</u>, nous ne sommes que de vaines formes de la matière, mais bien sublimes pour avoir inventé Dieu et notre âme. Si sublimes, mon ami! que je veux me donner ce spectacle de la matière, ayant conscience d'être et, cependant, s'élançant forcenément dans le Rêve qu'elle sait n'être pas, chantant l'Âme et toutes les divines impressions pareilles qui se sont amassées en nous depuis les premiers âges et proclamant, devant le Rien qui est la vérité, ces glorieux mensonges! // Tel est le plan de mon volume lyrique et tel sera peut-être son titre, <u>La Gloire du Mensonge</u>, ou <u>Le Glorieux Mensonge</u>. Je chanterai en désespéré!" (S. MALLARMÉ, <u>Correspondance</u>, tome I: 1862-1871, ed. Henri Mondor & Jean-Pierre Richard, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 207).

especially, the theme of the ravages of thought is prominent:

> La pensée, qui nous exalte et fait vivre, peut elle-même être un poison, et qui tue. Nous souffrons, nous mourons d'elle en ce moment, de son abus, des longs excès de l'analyse.(44)

> Nous avons abusé de la pensée, de la sensation, et ces abus nous ont affaiblis, énervés, émasculés comme des fumeurs d'opium [...].(45)

In the conflict which he perceives between thought and action, Lahor stands firmly on the side of the latter, joining with other advocates of a new 'vitalism'; life is to be lived, and not meditated upon: "Vis de toutes tes forces, aime, souffre et pleure, saigne s'il le faut, mais vis et sois grand [...]."(46)

Yet such a philosophy in no way escapes from the nihilism of his initial position. His hedonistic cult of living intensely has not brought back into the world any new values, or any heirarchy of values; nor has he discovered any new 'meaning' in existence. No more than Camus in Le Mythe de Sisyphe has he advanced beyond the stage of a total subjectivism, a position of tout est permis. Nor is the problem solved by the injunction that, in the absence of God from the universe, man can and must take the place of God - an idea sometimes entertained by Lahor's friend Mallarmé, and which will receive the most extravagant developments at the hands of Jarry - by the creation of his own world through dream. Man will deliver himself from "l'obsession du néant" "comme Dieu [sic], par la gloire sublime de ses rêves"(47); the idea recurs in Lahor's work like a leitmotiv, signalled by the repetition of the biblical phrase Eritis sicut Deus. But God is totally free, he is bound by no laws or constraints outside or within himself; God does as he

pleases.

Finally, Lahor transforms his philosophy of the acceptance of 'illusion' into an 'As if' philosophy. Faced with the meaninglessness and unreality of the world, man must nevertheless act <u>as if</u> it were meaningful and real:

> La sagesse serait de reconnaître, avec le Bouddha, que les phénomènes n'ont qu'une réalité incertaine, et à peu près aucun sens, que la plupart de nos actes ou de nos pensées sont d'insignifiance qui confine au néant, mais, en la pratique de la vie, d'agir comme si tout était réel [...].(48)

> Il faut par la pensée se résigner à tout, et dans l'action ne se résigner jamais, lutter comme si l'on devait vaincre, vivre comme si l'on ne pouvait mourir.(49)

Such a doctrine, however, is beset by the same contradictions as all similar 'As if' philosophies. We should live and act, says Lahor, as if things were real. But accepting which values, which goals, which ideals as 'real'? The answer can only be: those which each and every individual chooses to regard as such. On the plane of logic, Lahor has still not escaped from a position of complete subjectivism, from the consequences of his initial nihilism.

(iv) <u>The Philosophy of 'heroic pessimism' or 'heroic nihilism'</u>.

These solutions, however, are not Lahor's final answer. He himself does choose a particular ideal, a particular dream to be realised, the nature of which is indicated as early as 1872. Man may indeed be basically an animal, but he has the power to raise himself above this animal status:

> Sors donc de l'animalité: sois vraiment <u>homme</u>, c'est-à-dire un être nouveau dans la foule des êtres, qui s'est trouvé devant la dureté du Destin et qui n'a pas tremblé, devant l'Infini formidable et est resté debout, devant la Mort et l'a bravée, devant le Mal et l'a combattu, devant la laideur et l'a méprisée [...].(50)

The cornerstone of this new philosophy (and again a comparison with the thought of Camus presents itself) is the concept of revolt, from which can spring, as the example of the Buddha has shown, "la morale la plus haute". In a "combat sans espoir" against the "néant universel", man can find a stoic grandeur: Lahor never tires of quoting the "haute parole" of Marcus Aurelius, "Si tout marche au hasard, toi, du moins, n'agis point au hasard"(51). This revolt can serve "pour fonder à nouveau la justice et pour recréer l'ordre et la moralité dans un monde sans ordre, sans moralité, sans justice"(52). Like Huxley, in fact, before the failure to find any foundation for ethical values in nature, he concludes that morality, and indeed everything of value in human existence, arises from going against nature. Man must oppose his own law of justice, love and mercy to "l'antique loi de la Nature, qui a si longtemps régi le monde"(53).

> Puisque la vie est un combat, et que l'odieuse loi du plus fort est la loi de l'univers tout entier, aie compassion des faibles, des petits qui succombent, recueille les blessés, adoucis leurs souffrances, console leurs misères; aime comme le Bouddha ou Jésus.(54)

This is the basis of Lahor's final philosophy of "pessimisme héroïque" ou "nihilisme héroïque" (he admits the interchangeability of the two terms and himself uses them indiscriminately). By the correction, through education and science (that is first and foremost, for Lahor, medicine), of the "animalité primitive" of man, it will be possible to bring about a regeneration of all mankind. Already in Le Livre du Néant there are hints of this idea: mankind may be a "troupeau de singes", but "le singe quelquefois se transfigure, et, sublime, ressemble à Dieu"(55). Hints of an

earlier pessimism remain: man must have "de grandes pensées plutôt que de grands espoirs" in his struggle "pour l'Idéal, pour le divin, pour la beauté, pour la justice, pour toutes les illusions rayonnantes de l'amour et du rêve humains"(56). But through the collaboration of philosophers, poets and doctors (not surprisingly, all rôles which Lahor himself aspired to play) mankind will be regenerated in health, in vigour, in beauty, and life will be transformed into "une oeuvre d'art, oeuvre d'harmonie, de beauté, de justice, un Cosmos"(57). Ultimately, men will achieve the creation "d'une cité idéale, d'une cité divine, d'un cosmos en dehors de la création naturelle"(58). In this philosophy Lahor claims to have found, in spite of his initial nihilism, "une raison pour tous de vivre encore, d'agir et de s'intéresser encore à la vie, passionnément même [...]. Et je repousse donc le suicide qui devrait être la conséquence logique du pessimisme ou du nihilisme."(59).

The contradictions inherent in such a position are not difficult to see. How, in an 'absurd' and 'unreal' world, can such a weak and feeble creature as man, who is deceived even by his own senses, accomplish this revolt and realise this ideal? Lahor has surreptitiously contradicted one of the postulates which led to the formulation of his initial nihilism. Previously, everything was declared to be 'illusion', including - and indeed first and foremost, since the scientific justification for the doctrine was based on this very postulate - sensation and the evidence of the senses; in the words of the Buddha, which Lahor is so fond of quoting: "la forme est vide, la connaissance est vide"(*).

(*) Cf. also the following lines from the poem 'La Pitié du /

But now the "réalités tragiques" of "la mort, la souffrance, le mal" are excepted from the category of "le mensonge de tout"(60). In similar manner he has modified his view of the 'illusoriness' of the knowledge or truths discovered by science. Science has restored to him a confidence in "l'esprit, la volonté, les énergies de l'homme"(61). It has brought to him,

> si faibles qu'elles fussent, les seules lueurs dont pour moi s'éclairait un peu l'univers. Puis la science, autrement sans doute que les religions saintes, savait alléger aussi les souffrances et la misère humaines, du moins nos souffrances, notre misère physiques.(62)

At times, the contradiction is implicitly acknowledged. While declaring that man must oppose his own concepts of justice, love and mercy to the law of nature, he admits that these values are still "des illusions sublimes" which man opposes "aux réalités qui l'attristent, souvent l'accablent"(63). Elsewhere he significantly separates the categories of 'goodness' and 'truth'; exhorting man to be compassionate and just, he adds: "Et sois poète aussi, crée de glorieux mensonges. Parle du bien, proclame la splendeur du beau: - n'évite quelquefois que de parler du vrai."(64) In a poem in La Gloire du Néant of 1896, he writes that: "L'arbre de la science est l'arbre de la mort, / Et ses fruits sont amers à celui qui les goûte."(65) And in his autobiographical notes, Lahor frankly admits that the "raison d'être" which he found in his new philosophy did not provide an escape from his 'pessimism' or 'nihilism': "Évadé, non

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Cont. from previous page:
/ Boudha' [sic], in L'Illusion, 1875, pp. 158-9: "Comprends-tu le néant du monde [...]? / [...] sais-tu que tout est vain, / Que toute forme n'est qu'un mensonge, / Et que le monde entier, comme le corps humain, / N'est rien qu'un douloureux mensonge?"

du pessimisme, non du nihilisme, mais de cette nuit, mais des épouvantes, mais de la mort, où de telles doctrines m'auraient pu laisser [...]"(66). The new religion which he proposes to found will remain "une religion de désespérés", albeit "de désespérés héroïques"(67). Most of the time, however, such contradictions are passed over in silence.

In the later thought of Lahor racial theories play an increasingly important rôle. In his autobiographical notes he claims that with his faith in science went an equally strong faith in his race - that is, in the Aryan race [sic] which, in India first of all, had replied to "le mal et l'injustice universels" by the creation of "un idéal sublime d'amour et d'absolue justice"(68). These racial theories are coupled with the theories of Darwin which he turns into a doctrine of selection and breeding. By selective breeding and by education, he advocates the creation of a new, superior race of men, an élite, "une aristocratie, un règne humain supérieur"(69). "La science fondera bientôt une sorte de théocratie légitime [...]."(70)(*) And in this new heirarchy of human types, the 'hero' and the 'saint' will be placed above the poet and the artist. It is possible to see an influence of the ideas of Nietzsche on Lahor here, as also in his conception of 'heroic pessimism' or 'heroic nihilism'; this may well be, although there is no evidence of a direct influence, and such ideas were becoming increas-

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(*) Politically, Lahor's views follow similar lines; he is increasingly attracted to the ideas of de Maistre and Bonald and their latter-day disciples. An element of nationalism also enters his thought, remarkably similar to certain of the theories of Barrès: in the preface to La Gloire du Néant, Lahor speaks of the need to extend the limits of the moi to identify with the patrie.

ingly widespread by the end of the century. In any case, by 1896 Lahor has retreated so far from the radicalism of his initial nihilism that not only does he affirm the 'reality' of scientific truths, but he declares the same to be true of all man's notions of truth, of beauty, of justice and of virtue - beauty and justice being seen as arising from a concordance with a mysterious 'rhythm' immanent in the universe:

> Ainsi pour le pessimiste tout n'est pas illusion ou néant; car il s'est formé en cet univers, que le plus souvent il dédaigne, un royaume idéal de vérité, de beauté, de justice. Rien n'est mensonger en effet des acquisitions de la science, ni de ces rhythmes supérieurs reconnus par nous ou rêvés, et producteurs de la beauté parfaite; rien n'est mensonger de la justice, ce rhythme aussi, qui doit régir et ordonner les âmes, ni de la vertu, qui constitue pour elles la liberté vraie, l'absolue délivrance en face de certaines fatalités ou incitations de la Nature.(71)

Of existing conceptions of 'justice' he can even say that: "C'est une erreur de penser qu'une doctrine pessimiste et athée [read: <u>nihiliste</u>] puisse dégager personne de la soumission nécessaire aux lois de la justice."(72) Whilst elsewhere he states categorically that "l'homme d'aujourd'hui a le devoir d'aimer le beau", and that "cet homme moderne [...] doit également aimer le bien"(73). His new optimistic faith is summed up in 1896 in a superbly nineteenth-century <u>credo</u> which, if it were not for the apparent total absence of a sense of humour in Lahor, one would take to be a sardonic parody of the Apostles' Creed:

> Je crois dans l'homme tout-puissant, qui a créé le ciel et recréera la terre; qui a souffert comme Jésus, a été comme lui crucifié, a vécu dans les enfers; et qui aujourd'hui est ressuscité, et va rayonner dans sa gloire, et fera régner la justice, et bientôt jugera les vivants et les morts. Je crois à l'Esprit, à la Science, et à leur domination prochaine. Je crois à une Sainte Eglise universelle, à la communion

> des héros et des saints dans l'oeuvre de réparation, de rénovation, d'amour, qui se continue d'âge en âge. Je crois à la rémission de bien des péchés [sic], à la réconciliation de l'Esprit et de la Chair, à une haute vie idéale, et à mon éternité dans la vie éternelle de mon Espèce et du Monde. (74)

(v) Conclusion.

Starting from a position of radical nihilism coupled with an equally deep pessimism, Lahor has reached a view of the world which, in its trumpeting optimism and in the unshakeableness of its faith in science and the values it creates, appears as a typical product of the nineteenth century. The process of reasoning by which he attempts to pass from the one position to the other contains, from a logical point of view, a number of important contradictions. Moreover, the same basic contradictions are present in his work of 1872 as in that of 1896 and beyond; there is a frequent juxtaposition of radically different and often clearly opposed philosophical positions. How is this juxtaposition to be explained?

Several factors are at work, one of which is simply a failure to adjust to a new situation - to that of living in a relative world, in a 'world without transcendence'. Many of Lahor's laments - and the same is true of many another nineteenth-century thinker - concerning the 'absurdity' and ephemeralness of all things, the 'néant' of existence, derive from the emotional shock of finding himself in a new state. It would be wrong, however, to attempt to explain away his reaction entirely in these terms. Living in a relative and non-transcendent world does pose problems of a philosophical order (how is one to act where nothing is

'given'? guided by what principles, what ends?), problems which Lahor failed logically to resolve.

More important is the fact of the dual nature of Lahor's chief preoccupations in life. A philosophy of universal illusion may be all very well for a poet-philosopher chanting the glories of that illusion, that is 'making poetry'. But the poet Lahor was also Dr. Cazalis, a practising physician and active propagandist for a number of projects of medico-social reform; literature - and in this he differs from the majority of the writers with whom we shall be dealing here - was not his sole preoccupation, nor even the primary goal of his life. There is in fact a shift of emphasis in Lahor's work in the course of his life, as he turns his attention more and more to his professional and social-reformist activities (*). His nihilism, sincere though it may be in the realm of abstract speculation, is in a sense more 'metaphysical' than 'moral'; he is more aware of the 'absurdity' and unreality of things as a whole than in detail, more aware of the gratuitousness of existence generally than of particular acts. The two halves of his life - that of the poet-philosopher and that of the

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(*) Cf. in his autobiographical notes: "je lisais très peu de poètes, ma vie scientifique me prenant et m'occupant de plus en plus; j'en voyais très peu aussi; mes relations s'étaient portées ailleurs."(Notes et fragments biographiques, in Oeuvres choisies, 1909, p. xxxi).

For the period from 1876 to 1891 inclusive, Petitbon (Jean Lahor), lists no fewer than eight mémoires by Lahor dealing with medical questions. And for the years from 1901 to 1907 he lists the following publications whose titles throw an interesting light on the social-reformist preoccupations of Dr. Cazalis at this time: L'Art nouveau, L'Art pour le peuple à défaut de l'art par le peuple, Les Habitations à bon marché, Science et mariage (on the necessity of preserving the future of the race by the institution of a pre-marriage certificate!), and L'Alimentation à bon marché.

physician-cum-social reformer - remain separate, and the tension which exists between the problems raised by each is never resolved.

Finally, there is the question of 'social integration'. Lahor has nothing of the 'déraciné'; in a way in which few of the writers with whom we are here concerned are, he remains profoundly rooted in the bourgeois society of late nineteenth-century France, occupying a recognized and respected place in that society and convinced of the rôle he has to play in it. Whatever the results of abstract reasoning, in all practical matters the attitudes, the reactions, the prejudices of Lahor remain those of the social class into which he was born and to which he belongs. He is carried along by the conviction of nineteenth-century bourgeois society in the self-evident superiority and necessity of the values of 'civilisation', which it identifies with those of its own civilisation. If the arguments put forward by Lahor as a bridge from his initial nihilism to his final philosophical position have at times a strangely unconvincing air, it is perhaps because they are in large part merely pseudo-arguments, put forward to provide a post hoc theoretical justification for what in fact already is.

Yet in the tensions and contradictions of his thought, Lahor remains one of the most typical products of his age. He is representative to an extent in his interest in certain features of oriental philosophy and religious thought, while he offers one of the best examples of the deduction of a nihilistic philosophy from the latest theories of contemporary science concerning man and the universe. Finally, he

is typical in the conflict which arises between this theoretical nihilism and a fundamental will-to-live. It is in this representativeness that his chief interest lies; others - amongst them the young Jules Laforgue, over whom his work exercised a certain influence - were to follow in the same path.

Chapter VII: REFERENCES.

(1) Notes et fragments biographiques, in Oeuvres choisies, ed. S. Rocheblave, Paris, 1909, p. xxix.

(2) ibid., p. xxxii.

(3) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, Paris, 1896, p. i.

(4) La Gloire du Néant, p. 138.

(5) ibid., p. 136, and Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste et le pessimisme héroïque, Paris, 1906, p. 92.

(6) La Gloire du Néant, pp. 136-7.

(7) 'La Sagesse d'Al-Gazali', Le Livre du Néant, Paris, 1872, p. 89.

(8) Le Livre du Néant, p. 20; La Gloire du Néant, p. 16.

(9) Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste, Introduction, p. 7.

(10) 'Devant la Melancholia d'Albert Durer', L'Illusion, Paris, 1888, p. 204.

(11) Notes et fragments biographiques, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

(12) Cf. Le Livre du Néant, p. 15; La Gloire du Néant, p.11.

(13) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. ii.

(14) Cf. Le Livre du Néant, p. 22; La Gloire du Néant, p. 18.

(15) Le Livre du Néant, pp. 22-23; La Gloire du Néant, p. 18.

(16) Cf. La Gloire du Néant, pp. 131-2, 192.

(17) Le Livre du Néant, p. 47.

(18) Cf. Preface to La Gloire du Néant, pp. ii-iii; Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxii; and the poem 'Réminiscences' in L'Illusion, 1875.

(19) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. iii.

(20) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxiii.

(21) Preface to La Gloire du Néant,

(22) ibid., p. ii.

(23) Le Livre du Néant, p. 29; La Gloire du Néant, p. 23, slightly modified.

(24) Le Livre du Néant, p. 30; La Gloire du Néant, p. 24.

(25) Le Livre du Néant, p. 38; La Gloire du Néant, p. 31, slightly modified.

(26) Le Livre du Néant, p. 38; La Gloire du Néant, p. 31, slightly modified.

(27) Le Livre du Néant, p. 51; La Gloire du Néant, p. 42.

(28) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. ii.

(29) Notes et fragments biographiques, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

(30) Le Livre du Néant, p. 38; La Gloire du Néant, p. 31, slightly modified.

(31) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxiv.

(32) ibid., p. xxxv.

(33) La Gloire du Néant, p. 138.

(34) Le Livre du Néant, p. 72.

(35) Le Livre du Néant, pp. 43-44; La Gloire du Néant, pp. 37-38.

(36) Le Livre du Néant, pp. 76-77; La Gloire du Néant, p. 60, with very minor modifications.

(37) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. iii.

(38) loc. cit. Lahor's italics.

(39) Le Livre du Néant, p. 15; La Gloire du Néant, p. 10.

(40) Le Livre du Néant, p. 162.

(41) La Gloire du Néant, pp. 176-7, Lahor's italics. Cf. also Le Livre du Néant, p. 161.

(42) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxv.

(43) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. iv.

(44) La Gloire du Néant, p. 37.

(45) ibid., p. 186.

(46) ibid., p. 62, Lahor's italics.

(47) Le Livre du Néant, p. 70; La Gloire du Néant, p. 59.

(48) 'Cosmos', in La Gloire du Néant, p. 181. Cf. also the chapter entitled 'Pessimisme et nihilisme' in Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste, p. 118.

(49) Le Livre du Néant, p. 80; La Gloire du Néant, p. 63.

(50) Le Livre du Néant, p. 70; La Gloire du Néant, p. 59, with very minor modifications.

(51) Cf. 'Vers stoïciens' in L'Illusion, 1888, and Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste, Introduction, p.7.

(52) La Gloire du Néant, pp. 153-4.

(53) ibid., p. 62.

(54) Le Livre du Néant, pp. 78-79; La Gloire du Néant, pp. 61-62, with very minor modifications.

(55) Le Livre du Néant, p. 30.

(56) Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste, p. 117. Lahor's italics.

(57) 'Cosmos', in La Gloire du Néant, pp. 184-5. Lahor's italics.

(58) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. xi. Lahor's italics.

(59) Le Bréviaire d'un panthéiste, p. 117.

(60) La Gloire du Néant, p. 138.

(61) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxvi.

(62) loc. cit.

(63) La Gloire du Néant, p. 63.

(64) Le Livre du Néant, p. 79; La Gloire du Néant, p. 62.

(65) 'Les Quatrains d'Al Ghazali' in La Gloire du Néant. As cited in Oeuvres choisies, 1909, p. 129.

(66) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xliii,

(67) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, pp. xi-xii.

(68) Notes et fragments biographiques, p. xxxvi.

(69) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, p. xi. Cf. also pp. 197 ff. of this work.

(70) La Gloire du Néant, p. 211.

(71) ibid., pp. 182-3.

(72) ibid., p. 183.

(73) Preface to La Gloire du Néant, pp. vii-viii.

(74) 'Cosmos' in La Gloire du Néant, p. 250.

Chapter VIII: JULES LAFORGUE.

(i) Introduction.

Although little known during his short lifetime, and on the periphery of the literary movements of his day, the importance of Jules Laforgue (1860-1887) as a poet has since his death been increasingly recognized, until today he is considered to be one of the leading figures associated with symbolism. But Laforgue was not only an innovator in poetry, he was also one of the most philosophically-minded poets of his time. Our concern here is not with his poetry as such, magnificent as some of it is, but with his philosophical universe as it finds expression in his poetry and prose writings, in his correspondence, and in the many unpublished notes left behind at his death.

One point must be stressed at the outset. One of the major themes of the poetry and prose of Laforgue is that of personal, and in particular sexual, relationships. For some years he was torn between a profound need for love and affection, and an excessive timidity coupled with a revulsion for women as physical beings. As a consequence he suffered from an intense solitude which, on a psychological plane, was an important contributing factor to his nihilism. There is rich material for the psycho-analyst in Laforgue, and although such a study lies outside the bounds of this thesis, the importance of these personal, and often specifically sexual, factors must be constantly borne in mind in any discussion of the poet's work and thought.

Laforgue was born of French parents (his father was

a schoolmaster turned bank manager) in Montevideo, where he spent the first six years of his life. From the ages of six to fifteen he lived, separated from his parents, at Tarbes, where he attended (and hated) the lycée - presumably one of those barracks-type schools from which Maurice Barrès was also to suffer as a child. His parents returned to France in 1876, but his mother died the following year. Jules finished his studies at the Lycée Fontanes (now Condorcet) in Paris, though thrice failing to obtain his baccalauréat as a result of timidity at the oral. He obtained a part-time post as secretary to Charles Ephrussi, a wealthy art-dealer and critic, but spent most of the next few years reading and meditating in the libraries of Paris, for the most part desperately lonely; his few friends included the still relatively young Paul Bourget, the scientist-cum-dilettante man of letters Emile Henry (not to be confused with the anarchist terrorist of the same name!), and the young fellow-poet Gustave Kahn. At the end of 1881 Laforgue obtained, through Bourget and Ephrussi, the post of French Reader to the Empress Augusta of Germany, where he remained for the next five years, enjoying a comfortable but dull existence. At the end of 1886 he married Leah Lee, an English governess whom he had met in Berlin, and the couple lived, in some poverty, in Paris from the beginning of 1887 until Laforgue's tragic death, of tuberculosis, in August of that same year (followed by that of his wife a year later, of the same cause).

Laforgue's literary work includes an early, abandoned collection of verse, Le Sanglot de la Terre (probably written

between 1880 and 1882), Les Complaintes (written between 1882 and 1884 and published in 1885), L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune (published 1886), a further abandoned collection of verse, Des Fleurs de bonne volonté (1886, published posthumously), from which were drawn Le Concile féerique (published 1886) and the posthumously published collection entitled Derniers Vers. He also wrote a collection of satirical prose tales entitled Moralités légendaires, published just after his death in 1887, as well as a series of notes and jottings on philosophical and aesthetic subjects which, though published by his friends in various literary reviews of the late 1880's and early 1890's, have never been satisfactorily re-edited.(*)

(*) Six of a planned eight volumes of a definitive edition of Laforgue's works (entitled Oeuvres complètes de Jules Laforgue) were published by the Mercure de France between 1922 and 1931, and have since been reprinted. These contain: I: Le Sanglot de la Terre, Les Complaintes, L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune; II: Des Fleurs de bonne volonté, Le Concile féerique, Derniers Vers; III: Moralités légendaires; IV: Lettres, 1881-82; V: Lettres, 1883-87; VI: Berlin, la cour et la ville (notes on Berlin, published posthumously). To date, however, the final two volumes, which will contain Laforgue's valuable notes on aesthetics and other subjects, have failed to appear. A selection of these notes (though very poorly edited and containing many errors) can be found in volume III of an earlier edition of Laforgue's works published by the Mercure de France in 1900-1903, entitled Mélanges posthumes. Most of the remainder (though again very poorly edited) can be found in the first two volumes of an 'Edition des inédits de Jules Laforgue' published by the Editions de la Connaissance, Paris, 1920-21, entitled respectively: Chroniques parisiennes, Ennuis non rimés, and Dragées, Charles Baudelaire, Tristan Corbière. For a fully reliable version of these many important notes, however, it is necessary to refer back to the reviews of the 1880's and 1890's in which they were originally published - a task rendered difficult by the proliferation of fungus in the store-houses of certain of the major Paris libraries!

In addition to the above-mentioned correspondence, Laforgue's letters to Gustave Kahn were published by the Mercure de France in 1941 under the title Lettres à un ami, 1880-86. Laforgue's letters to Bourget have never been published, due to the refusal first of Bourget and then of his family.

(ii) The early nihilism of Laforgue.

Laforgue's early work and correspondence show him to be a very naïve and excitable young man. More important, he is a young man who lives in a world of abstract, metaphysical problems: "avant d'être dilettante et pierrot j'ai séjourné dans le Cosmique", he writes some years later(1). He probes the questions of ultimate ends and purposes in the universe, longing for an absolute of knowledge and certainty, yet unable to find one; and he makes of these abstract metaphysical questions desperately personal matters. There is a degree of melodramatic self-pity and self-dramatisation in this work, but by and large the anguish he feels is real(*).

A passage in his posthumously published notes describes the object of Laforgue's early literary ambitions:

> MES LIVRES. - Oeuvre de littérature et oeuvre de prophète des temps nouveaux.
> Un volume de vers que j'appelle philosophiques. Sans prétention. Naïvement. [...]. (2)

This work will be "l'histoire, le journal d'un Parisien de 1880, qui souffre, doute et arrive au néant". Its setting will be resolutely modern and urban, and its style that of naturalism and in particular of the Goncourts: "et cela dans le décor parisien, les couchants, la Seine, les averses, les pavés gras, les Jablochkoff, et cela dans une langue

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(*) Cf. his comments on his own loss of religious faith, expressing his amazement - similar to that of Lahor, but more sincere and less 'literary' - at the indifference of others to a similar loss: "Alors je m'étonne que les philosophes qui exécutent quotidiennement l'idée de la justice, les idoles religieuses, et métaphysiques, et morales, soient si peu émus, à croire qu'ils ne sont pas persuadés de l'existence de ces choses." (Mélanges posthumes, Mercure de France, 1903, p. 7).

d'artiste, fouillée et moderne, sans souci des codes du goût, sans crainte du cru, du forcené, des dévergondages cosmologiques, du grotesque, etc."(3). The title of the work will be Le Sanglot de la Terre, and it will express "les sanglots de la pensée, du cerveau, de la conscience de la terre", and "toute la misère, toute l'ordure de la planète"(4). What in fact survives of this project is merely a collection of some thirty or more poems. Nevertheless, taken together these do manage to fulfil Laforgue's aim, to express in poetic form a resolutely modern, scientific view of the universe, a 'cosmic poetry'. The literary sources of this aim are various: Lahor, Leconte de Lisle, Louise Ackermann, and most important of all Hugo (still enjoying a considerable prestige amongst the young poets of 1880) and the Sully Prudhomme of La Justice (1878). But in contrast to the ultimate optimism of the latter two poets (albeit fragile in the case of Sully), the vision of Laforgue is of the deepest pessimism coupled with a radical nihilism.

The formation of this view of the world undoubtedly began with Laforgue's loss of his childhood religious faith, which seems to have occurred around 1879. He was left, he claims with a 'religious neurosis':

> [...] j'analyserai ma petite névrose, car j'en ai une. Une névrose religieuse. J'étais croyant. Depuis deux ans, je ne crois plus. Je suis un pessimiste mystique.(5)

> Je croyais. Puis, brusque déchirement. Deux ans de solitude dans les bibliothèques, sans amour, sans amis, la peur de la mort. Des nuits à méditer dans une atmosphère de Sinaï.(6)

It is science which has for Laforgue killed this religious faith, yet without itself replacing it as a new faith. In

his thirst for knowledge, and in particular for metaphysical knowledge and truth - "la Vérité sur le cas de Tout"(7) -, Laforgue eagerly searched out the most 'modern' ideas of his time, and the latest conclusions of contemporary science and philosophy. The influence of the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer can be detected in much of Le Sanglot de la Terre(8); although The Origin of Species dates from 1859, and its French translation from 1862, the struggle for acceptance of Darwin's ideas in France was sufficiently protracted for those ideas to have lost little of their impact by 1880. But most important of all in its impact upon the mind - or the imagination - of the young Laforgue was astronomy, and in particular the immensely succesful popularising works of Camille Flammarion(*). From Flammarion, Laforgue derives his conceptions of the genesis of planets from nebulae, of life on other planets, of the 'death' of stars and planets, in particular of our own sun and earth. He takes also from Flammarion a condemnation of geocentrism - the tendency to see this earth as the 'centre' of the universe in some vast cosmic plan(9). But Laforgue's reaction to these ideas is the very opposite of that of Flammarion. The latter attacks geocentrism with savage delight, light-

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(*) La Pluralité des mondes habités (1862), Les Mondes imaginaires et les mondes réels (1865), Les Merveilles célestes (1865), Lumen (1873), Les Terres du Ciel (1877); and, in the year in which the best part of Le Sanglot de la Terre was written and possibly also the year of its conception, L'Astronomie populaire (1880). It is certain that Laforgue read at least some of these works, as must any eager aspirant to a knowledge of contemporary scientific conceptions of the universe have done (Flammarion's La Pluralité des mondes habités went through 25 editions between 1862 and 1876!). He refers specifically in a later note - ironically, but the irony is at his own expense also - to "les poésies de Flammarion".

heartedly adopts 'le point de vue de Sirius', and even describes with apparent gaiety the ultimate necessary destruction of the sun and 'the death of the earth'; he is in fact borne along by a 'negative' faith, by the force of his attack on the Christian world-view and its vestiges in contemporary thought; whilst elsewhere he can express a boundless faith in the miracles of 'science' and the ultimate perfectibility of the human race(10). For Laforgue, on the other hand, the same facts or ideas are the source of a nihilistic despair as he contemplates the 'absurdity' of all existence.

Many of the ideas making up this nihilistic world-view re-echo those of Lahor; it will therefore suffice merely to indicate them briefly. A constant theme of Le Sanglot de la Terre is the multiplicity of planets and galaxies, the infinity of the universe in space and time; there is also the idea of the existence of life on myriads of other planets - which deprives man of his exclusive position as the centre of creation - , though elsewhere this is contradicted by the affirmation of the absolute solitude of man(11). But here Laforgue is less dazzled by the immensity and splendour of the cosmos than obsessed by the idea of the puniness and insignificance of the earth, to say nothing of mankind, in this vastness(12). His meditation then moves from the physical plane to the metaphysical, to the apparent purposelessness of all this activity. Two poems of Le Sanglot show an anguished questioning: where in all this is there evidence of design, of a grand designer?(13) More often, however, there is a recognition of the 'absurdity'

of existence: the universe is an "affolement universel"(14).

Then comes the by-now familiar theme of the 'indifference' of the rest of the universe - that is, of 'nature' - to mankind. Man, and this earth, are abandoned and alone, "abandonnés de tout, sans amour et sans père"(15). Equally important, for Laforgue, is a consciousness of the ephemeralness of phenomena and of the omnipresence and inevitability of death. Death menaces on three levels, the cosmic, the historical, and the individual. A central theme of Le Sanglot de la Terre is that of 'the death of the earth', which receives its finest expression in one of the few really good poems of the work, 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la terre'. A speck of dust in the infinity of space, a moment in the eternity of time, the earth like everything else will die one day; indeed, this can happen at any moment, by a chance collision with another planet, or slowly by the cooling of the sun - in either case a demonstration of the randomness which governs the universe. Another important theme is that of the death and disappearance of successive civilisations; again the best treatment of this theme is to be found in the 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la terre', certain of the historical tableaux of the poem recalling those of Leconte de Lisle. Implicit in the poem is the idea of the present decline (or 'decadence') and eventual disappearance of contemporary civilisation also. Finally, the theme of individual death and the brevity of existence looms large in the work; curiously, one of the sources of the poet's despair is not only the idea of death itself (considered as an end pure and simple), but that he will die 'knowing

nothing'(16).(*)

Laforgue is left with a highly emotional sense of the 'absurdity' of all things. "Tout est donc en démence!" he exclaims(17); the world is a "néant sans coeur"(18). To this nihilism is added a deeply pessimistic insistence on the misery and squalor of human existence (in which the squalor of sex - in Laforgue's eyes - plays an important part). The Baudelairean 'Litanies de misère' is a long catalogue of human miseries, from the sufferings of childbirth to the agonies of death; interesting in the poem is a conception, doubtless Darwinian in origin, of life as incessant struggle:

> Car la vie à chaque heure est une âpre bataille.
> Et malheur aux vaincus, aux faibles, aux trop doux,
> Aux trop bons pour vouloir hurler avec les loups.

At times life is seen as tragic; more often, man does not even have the dignity of tragedy: he is "par trop ridicule", and life is but "une farce éphémère"(19).

Difficult to define, but forming an integral part of Laforgue's early nihilism, is his concept of 'Illusion'. His verse and prose both contain references to "l'Illusion" and 'the veil of Maya'(20); the terminology suggests an ultimate

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(*) It is possible that Laforgue had fears of his own death during the winter of 1880-81; a letter of 30-11-1881 to his sister Marie speaks of his "palpitations" during this period (Oeuvres complètes, Mercure de France, IV, p. 36). Some of his posthumously published notes refer to a preoccupation with death in which there appears to be an autobiographical element. There are also indications that Laforgue thought of writing a book on the subject of death; a note published after his own death reads: "franchement un vol. de / Méditations sur la mort / Epigraphe: "Frère, il faut mourir" / titre: Mourir, mourir..." (Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Jan. 1892, p. 2. Laforgue's italics. Reprinted in vol. II of Laforgue's 'Inédits', Editions de la Connaissance, p. 93.).

Buddhist origin, but the immediate source is to be found in Schopenhauer and especially in the work of his part-disciple Eduard von Hartmann, La Philosophie de l'Inconscient(*). Following the two German philosophers, Laforgue is led to speak of "le mal universel" to which the only solution is a total negation of life, either through suicide or through 'renunciation'(**). All else is 'illusion'. The term

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(*) In several poems of Le Sanglot the poet casts himself in the rôle of a suffering Christ or Buddha. And he later makes several ironical references to his having 'played at Buddha' during his months of solitude in Paris. (Cf. letter to Mme Mültzer, March 1882, Oeuvres complètes, IV, pp. 127-8. Cf. also the poem 'Préludes autobiographiques' in Les Complaintes.)

The respective influence of Schopenhauer and of Hartmann's Die Philosophie des Unbewussten (Berlin, 1869; trans. D. Nolen, Paris, 2 vol., 1877) is difficult to determine. In Germany in 1882 Laforgue made two visits to Frankfurt which included 'pilgrimages' to the house of Schopenhauer (cf. O.C., IV, p.187). The source of his knowledge of Schopenhauer at the time of Le Sanglot could not however have been the original, since his German was at this stage insufficient. His knowledge therefore probably derived partly from the philosopher's French commentators (including A. Burdeau's recent translation of Le Fondement de la morale (1879) and perhaps J. Bourdeau's first anthology of 1880), and partly - perhaps above all - from Hartmann. (It may also owe something to Caro's lectures of 1877 and subsequent volume (1878) on Le Pessimisme au XIXe siècle, although Caro is scarcely sympathetic towards his subject.) Laforgue's notes in fact reveal borrowings from both men. Hartmann's Philosophie de l'Inconscient was already a Bible for Laforgue as early as December 1880 (Cf. letter to Kahn, Lettres à un ami, pp. 18-19, 22).

(**) A passage published in Mélanges posthumes (p. 10) gives some idea of the influence of the ideas of Schopenhauer and Hartmann over Laforgue at this stage:

"LE SAGE DE L'HUMANITÉ NOUVELLE. CATÉCHISME PESSIMISTE. - Absurdité des remèdes. Deux solutions proposées: Bouddha, l'Inde vénérable - Shopenhaüer [sic], Hartmann.

Pas de remède absolu, universel, qui supprime le mal universel. Rêves de dilettantes: l'atrophie du vouloir, l'insaisissable présent partout sous les mille variétés de l'illusion, désir, appétit sexuel, etc.

Jamais on n'atteindra l'essence même de la Volonté, le principe mystérieux, insaisissable qui circule partout. Il faut se contenter du suicide matériel et du renoncement.

Tuez votre existence individuelle, matériellement ou intellectuellement, mais ne songez pas à tuer le Vouloir universel. Travaillez à l'art et à la science, multiplication des moyens d'extase, de contemplation, la seule trêve au supplice de l'Être."

applies firstly to the appearances of love and beauty by which the 'génie de l'espèce' enslaves men to the mechanisms of reproduction (Laforgue accepts completely the analysis of Schopenhauer, which is pursued by Hartmann(*)). But it also has a much wider application, and Laforgue accepts wholly Hartmann's concept of 'Illusion' which requires some elucidation. It forms an integral part of the latter's radical pessimism: first and foremost, it is the belief in the possibility of 'happiness', in any form whatsoever, which is 'illusion'(**). But the concept of 'Illusion' also forms an

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(*) Cf. the following note of Laforgue, which is pure Hartmann:
"l'étalon (criterium) du véritable (unique) amour est le degré d'illusion où nous jette l'être aimé sur la réalité des fins de tout amour; le degré de perfectionnement dans la duperie - l'aveuglement.[...]
Le but du génie de l'espèce est de nous abuser par l'appât de l'idéal sur les fins qui le servent
mieux absolument il nous dupe, mieux nous aimons.
moins nous sommes abusés, moins nous aimons."
(Publ. in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, May 1892, p. 199. Repr. in vol. II of Laforgue's inédits, Ed. de la Connaissance, p. 104).
The same theme is treated in many of the poems of Les Complaintes (Cf. amongst others 'Complainte des voix sous le Figuier bouddhique', 'Complainte des formalités nuptiales', 'Complainte de l'orgue de barbarie'). By an amusing paradox, this concept of love, which at first provokes resentment in Laforgue, will ultimately help him towards an acceptance of sexual relationships by appearing to remove responsibility for his acts from his own shoulders.

(**) Hartmann divides the history of the human race into three stages, corresponding to the evolution of this belief. In the 'first stage of Illusion' - corresponding to the ancient world - happiness is conceived of as attainable in the present and in this world; in the second (the Middle Ages) it is conceived of as realisable by the individual in a life after death; in the third ("Temps moderne") happiness is "conçu comme réalisable dans l'avenir du processus du monde", that is involving a belief in progress towards an earthly utopia. Hartmann takes up Schopenhauer's analysis of the negativity of pleasure and the reality only of pain or suffering (though he excepts from the first category - as does Laforgue - "les jouissances de la science et de l'art" (Cf. Phil. de l'Incon., tome II, ch. XIII, pp. 416 ff.)); but to this he adds an almost mathematical equation between the sum total of pleasures to be found in the world, and the sum total of suffering - the scales tipping overwhelmingly, of course, in favour of the latter. It is worth noting that there is a savage delight in his onslaughts on Christian beliefs - in particular on that in immortality.

integral part of Hartmann's nihilism, applying also to human values. Hartmann explicitly takes up and extends Schopenhauer's devastating critique of all values and ideals, attacking them with savage delight to arrive at an absolute of moral nihilism.

At the end of his demonstration of the 'evil' of existence, Hartmann calls upon mankind to use all the means of science and technology at its disposal to bring about, ultimately, a collective suicide! And La Philosophie de l'Inconscient ends on a tableau of the possible end of humanity, through the consciousness of the madness (la folie) and the misery of existence. Such a vision was adopted also by the young Laforgue; indeed, a letter of 1880 to Gustave Kahn reveals his plans for a novel portraying a young artist, "un charmant disciple de Schopenhauer", who aims to depict "l'épopée macabre de l'humanité (l'histoire et le XIXe siècle) en trois [grands] cartons correspondant aux trois stades de l'Illusion de Hartmann", with an epilogue portraying "l'humanité des derniers jours quand l'Illusion sera morte, que les cités seront désertées, que l'homme, la tête rasée, couverte de cendres, attendra le néant"(21).(*) Laforgue's most extreme reaction to the world-view revealed to him by contemporary science, and confirmed by his philosophical

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(*) A note published in Mélanges posthumes (pp. 8-9) and obviously written about the same time confirms this project: the hero of Laforgue's novel dreams of creating four great frescoes: "l'épopée de l'humanité, la danse macabre des derniers temps de la planète, les trois stades de l'Illusion". The work, a "grand livre de prophétie", will also portray "le déchirement de l'Illusion", revealing "la vanité de tout [...], l'Inutilité de l'univers, la misère et l'ordure de la terre". (Laforgue's italics throughout).

mentors, is thus a desire for a universal annihilation - at times violent, at times in the form of an ultimate extinction of life by a universal 'renunciation'(22). Such a wish for total destruction or annihilation one might even call a form of 'total nihilism'.

Laforgue's nihilism is partly determined, of course, by his former faith - by the intellectual expectations it had aroused in him and which, with the destruction of that faith, 'science' was unable to satisfy. (It is an eloquent comment upon the 'scientism' of the age that he should ever have thought it could.) Hence, in his despair, he attacks and calls mankind to rebellion first against God, then, in the absence of the latter, against the 'universe' itself(23). (In distinction, however, to the thought of both Lahor and, later, Camus, this rebellion or revolt does not lead in Laforgue to any attempt to create new values based upon it.) For all his claims to be intellectually an old man - "un très vieux vieillard"(24) - the extreme naïvety, as well as the 'metaphysical intoxication', of the young Laforgue could not be more evident.

Laforgue's is in fact a mind divided against itself: intellectually, he accepts the picture of the world revealed to him by contemporary science; morally, he rejects it. There is an element of self-dramatisation in his early work, and even a certain 'wallowing' in his own nihilism. But fundamentally his anguish is sincere, the extremity of his reaction resulting from his utter absorption in a world of ideas, and not in a world of personal experience (which makes of his nihilism, for all its genuineness, a purely

theoretical nihilism); he is reacting to the situation of 'Man' in general and in the abstract, and not to the particular concrete place in the world of Jules Laforgue. In his later work the part played by personal problems will be far greater; nevertheless his basic vision of the world will remain the same.

(iii) An attempt at 'salvation': the Unconscious.

The poems of Les Complaintes, written between 1882 and 1884, reveal the entry into Laforgue's thought of a new element, the concept of the 'Unconscious', derived from Hartmann and the subject of a veritable attempt at 'salvation' on the part of Laforgue. Although Hartmann's Philosophie de l'Inconscient had been the Bible of Laforgue at least as early as 1880, he had at first been influenced most of all by the German philosopher's fusion of nihilism and pessimism, and in particular his concept of 'Illusion'. Only gradually did Laforgue absorb Hartmann's philosophy of the 'Unconscious'; the process can be traced in his correspondence of the next few years(25).

Why did this philosophy exercise such an influence over Laforgue? Part of the answer is to be found in Laforgue's interest in aesthetics: in his efforts to elaborate a new, relativistic aesthetic justifying the total freedom of creation of the artist, and incorporating the all-important concept of evolution (applied by Laforgue both to the evolution of the organs of perception and to that of "le sens esthétique", aesthetic values and standards) - in opposition to the neo-classical aesthetic of Taine (whose lectures at

the Ecole des Beaux-Arts he assiduously attended while in Paris) with its emphasis on a static, absolute 'Beauty' and taking as its models the achievements of Greek sculpture(*). Much of Laforgue's thinking on aesthetics is directly inspired by Hartmann; however, this is not our chief concern here, and Laforgue's interest in Hartmann also derives from his more specifically metaphysical (as well as psychological) preoccupations. It is worth recalling here the extent to which the claim of Schopenhauer to have placed metaphysics

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(*) Hartmann had specifically set out in a chapter on "L'Inconscient dans le jugement esthétique" (tome I, Seconde Partie, ch. V) to reconcile "les idéalistes" and "les empiriques". Laforgue too believed that his conception of an Unconscious involved in a process of constant evolution succeeded in reconciling idealists and Tainean deterministic positivists. Cf. his variation upon Taine's celebrated formula of determinism, transposed to the plane of art: "On a aujourd'hui un sentiment plus exact de la Vie en nous et hors de nous. Chaque homme est selon son moment dans le temps, son milieu de race et de condition sociale, son moment d'évolution individuelle, un certain clavier sur lequel le monde extérieur joue d'une certaine façon. Mon clavier est perpétuellement changeant et il n'y en a pas un autre identique au mien. Tous les claviers sont légitimes." (Mélanges posthumes, p. 141). And on the development of the arts he states that: "L'état le plus favorable à la liberté de cette évolution est la suppression des écoles, des jurés, des médailles, ces meubles enfantins, du patronage de l'Etat, du parasitisme des critiques d'art sans oeil; le dilettantisme nihiliste, l'anarchie ouverte à toutes les influences, telle qu'elle règne parmi les artistes français en ce moment: "Laissez faire, Laissez passer"." (ibid., p. 142).

Laforgue's aesthetic - summed up in the two key phrases "tous les claviers sont légitimes" and "laissez faire, laissez passer" - amounts in fact to a refusal of all value judgements except that of novelty or originality (he states his own aim at one point as "faire de l'original à tout prix") - a transposition onto the plane of aesthetics of Dostoïevsky's tout est permis. On an ethical plane, his attitude would amount to one of a complete nihilism, although to be fair Laforgue's mind is here only on aesthetic matters.

on an empirical footing added to his appeal in a scientifically-minded age; the same claim was made by Hartmann - indeed, his pretensions to an empirical approach are expressed in the sub-title to his work, 'Résultats spéculatifs obtenus par la méthode inductive des sciences de la nature'(*). And it is significant to find that Laforgue considered Hartmann's philosophy of the Unconscious to be, in his own words, "le dernier mot humain de la métaphysique expérimentale" and "la métaphysique inductive des sciences expérimentales de la vie"(26). However, he did not take over the whole system of Hartmann, paying relatively little attention, for example, to the latter's studies in psychology and of the nervous system; rather, he adapted Hartmann to his own philosophical and psychological needs.

Hartmann's Philosophie de l'Inconscient, as published in the French translation of Nolen in 1877, contains three parts in two volumes. Volume I describes 'the phenomenology of the Unconscious'; its first section deals with "la manifestation de l'inconscient dans la vie corporelle" (Hartmann maintains that the life of the organism is dominated by unconscious reflexes), the second with its manifestation in the human mind; this is followed by an appendix entitled 'Etudes sur la physiologie des centres nerveux'. The second volume is entitled 'Métaphysique de l'Inconscient', and it is here that one finds, amongst other things, Hartmann's 'trois stades de l'Illusion'

(*) Nolen, in his introduction to La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, claims that the work (published originally in 1869) bridged the gap which had existed in the 1860's between the natural sciences and speculative metaphysics, and that it was to "provoquer enfin le réveil de l'activité métaphysique" (tome I, p. vii).

and his prescriptions for bringing existence to an end. The two volumes in fact deal with radically different phenomena, and the translator Nolen is right to protest in his introduction against "le nom équivoque d'Inconscient"(27); the first is concerned with a psychological or psycho-physiological reality, and contains lengthy and detailed analyses, of considerable scientific interest at the time, based on the latest research and speculation in the fields of psychology and the study of the nervous system; the second volume is concerned with a transcendent metaphysical reality which is basically a fusion of Schopenhauer's blind 'Will' and Hegel's rational 'Idea'. Nevertheless Laforgue adopted and developed ideas from both volumes of the work.

Laforgue's own 'Unconscious' represents fundamentally three things: a subconscious psychological reality; a metaphysical reality; and a state of 'unconsciousness' conceived of as an escape from thought and responsibility.

First of all, it is a psychological reality, the mysterious world of the human sub-conscious (which, on a literary plane, was to be 'discovered' and exploited some 40 years later by the surrealists). Laforgue sees contemporary thought (and society) rapidly evolving towards an increasingly dry, dessicated rationalism - the opposite of 'life':

> Aujourd'hui tout préconise et tout se précipite à la culture exclusive de la Raison, de la logique, de la conscience -
> La culture bénie de l'avenir est la déculture, la mise en jachère.
> Nous allons à la dessication: squelettes de cuir, à lunettes, rationalistes, anatomiques.(28)(*)

(*) Laforgue's conceptions here may well owe something to his friend and mentor Bourget (whose influence on the early development of his art, at least, is incontestable). Cf. Bourget's account of the 'ravages of thought' and of 'analysis' in his /

Salvation lies in plunging once again into the waters of the Unconscious: "Retournons, mes frères, vers les [grandes] eaux de l'Inconscient [...]."(29) At times, this is conceived of as an abandon to the forces of 'instinct'; as the 'Complainte des formalités nuptiales' puts it,

> Dans les jardins
> De nos instincts
> Allons cueillir
> De quoi guérir.(30)

More often, though, the Unconscious (in this sense) is seen as a new source of inner richness, a remedy to the dessication wrought by the intellect and by rationalism. This is in part the meaning in Laforgue's work of the description of the Berlin Aquarium, written in 1886 and incorporated into Salomé, in Les Moralités légendaires (31) - a symbol of the incalculable depths and richness, and the strange and exotic flora and fauna, of the Unconscious. The desire to know and to explore these depths is powerfully expressed in a well-known passage from Laforgue's notes:

> La rage de vouloir se connaître - de plonger sous

Cont. from previous page:
/ Essais de psychologie contemporaine: "Il est certain que si la pensée n'est pas un pouvoir toujours meurtrier, elle n'est pas non plus un pouvoir toujours bienfaisant [...]." This 'thought' inevitably leads to "l'usure physiologique, l'usure du sentiment et l'usure de la volonté", whilst analysis dries up feeling, "empêche le sourd travail de l'inconscience dans notre coeur et tarit la sensibilité comme à sa source"; an excess of both of these has produced in modern man "la trace évidente d'un sang appauvri, d'une énergie musculaire diminuée, d'un nervosisme exagéré". (Essais, 2e éd., Lemerre, 1885, pp. 149-151). This leads Bourget to a thoroughgoing attack on 'thought' and 'reason' combined: "notre âge moderne [est] persuadé [...] que l'homme vit seulement d'intelligence, et il joue avec la pensée comme un enfant avec un poison" (ibid., p. 151). And elsewhere: "La pensée [...] est comme un de ces périlleux agents chimiques, d'un maniement nécessaire sans doute, mais qui exige d'infinies précautions." In such comments as these can be seen the seeds of the systematic anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism of many of the symbolist generation - and beyond!

> sa culture consciente vers "l'Afrique intérieure" de notre Inconscient domaine.[...]
> Je me sens si pauvre, si connu tel que je me connais moi, Laforgue en relation avec le monde extérieur - Et j'ai des mines riches, des gisements, des mondes sous-marins qui ferment inconnus - Ah! c'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là que je voudrais mourir. Des fleurs étranges qui tournent comme des têtes de cire de coiffeurs lentement sur leurs tiges, des pierreries féeriques comme celles où dort Galatée de Moreau surveillée par Polyphème, des coraux heureux sans rêves, des lianes de rubis, des floraisons subtiles où l'oeil de la conscience n'a pas porté la hache et le feu - . (32)

The immediate source of this concept is undoubtedly Hartmann, in particular the first volume of La Philosophie de l'Inconscient(*).

Secondly, Laforgue's Unconscious is a metaphysical reality, containing even a suggestion of a new teleology. Laforgue, for a time, follows Hartmann in his attempted fusion of Schopenhauer's blind Will and Hegel's rational Idea, complemented by the Darwinian concept of the evolution of the species (Hegel had excluded from his system, albeit based on the notion of Entwicklung, all concepts of organic evolution). For Laforgue, the Unconscious in this context is above

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(*) An echo of some of the above-quoted passages can be found in Hartmann, extending even to a similarity of terms. Cf. for example Hartmann's quotations from the novelist Jean-Paul Richter: "Nous attribuons au riche empire du Moi des dimensions trop petites et trop étroites, quand nous en retranchons le domaine de l'Inconscient, que l'on peut, en un certain sens, appeler véritablement une Afrique intérieure. Le globe immense et si plein que peuplent nos souvenirs ne découvre à l'esprit, à chaque seconde de sa révolution, que quelques pics lumineux: le reste de ce monde demeure enseveli dans l'ombre." "[...] le domaine de l'Inconscient est le royaume de l'insondable, de l'incommensurable; en chaque esprit agit et domine cet Inconscient. La pauvreté, grâce à lui, se sent riche et voit reculer dans l'invisible les limites de sa puissance." "N'est-ce pas une pensée consolante que celle de la découverte d'une telle richesse dans notre âme?" (Cited in La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, tome I, p. 29. My italics.)

all "la Loi" (with a Hegelian capital letter); it is the driving force behind all activity, that which drives the artist to create (the artist, and especially the 'genius', is an "élu de l'Inconscient"(33)), the thinker to think, and the species to copulate and reproduce. Its determinism embraces and surpasses mankind: "Au-dessus de l'humanité, la Loi suit son développement réflexe et l'Inconscient souffle où il veut"(34). Does this 'Law', however, operate blindly, or is there some purpose in its activity, some goal towards which the cosmic evolution determined by it is moving? A hint of purpose, though only a hint, is contained in the oft-repeated phrase: "L'artiste s'agite; l'Inconscient le mène."(35) Whilst in a note Laforgue refers to the Unconscious as "la Raison explicative, suffisante, unique, intestine, dynamique et loyale de l'Histoire universelle de la vie"(36). The clearest statement of this idea, however, is to be found in Laforgue's chief attempt to create a new aesthetic, the essay L'Art moderne en Allemagne. Here the Unconscious is both 'divine' and a metaphysical (and apparently purposeful) 'Ideal'. This Ideal works through the evolutionary process, and "la simple loi de la sélection naturelle universelle implique tendance divine en soi"; "un Idéal vivifie, ordonne et domine tout"; it is "une tendance occulte présente partout"; "au-dessus [...] du monde changeant des phénomènes se développerait un Idéal, la Loi"(37). The Unconscious is "le principe mystique universel" revealed by Hartmann, "le seul divin", "infaillible"(38). Moreover, a specifically Hegelian note enters (though probably through the agency of Hartmann): Laforgue describes the Unconscious as "la force unique, constante, évoluant indéfiniment vers la conscience pure";

"la Loi, s'objectivant en mondes explorateurs vers la conscience depuis l'éternité"; and again, he speaks of "l'évolution vers la Conscience pure" and even of "l'épuration du miroir où se cherche l'Inconscient"(39).

Clearly, Laforgue has here introduced into his conception of the world a new teleology, derived from Hegel through Hartmann, which contradicts his earlier affirmations of the absence of finality in the universe. However, several important comments are called for upon this new teleology. The first concerns the vagueness of the goal towards which Laforgue sees this universal evolution tending - in marked contrast to Hartmann, who sees a very definite and clearly conceived end (namely, a return to an original 'nothingness'). For Laforgue, this goal can never be reached: the 'Ideal' is placed "dans un devenir indéfini"(40). Secondly, whereas for both Hegel and Hartmann mankind is at the centre of the cosmic process, for Laforgue it is only on the periphery. Part of his old vision of the 'uselessness' and 'abandonment' of the earth remains even here: "la Loi [...] en est actuellement arrivée infiniment au-delà de ce que notre humanité peut offrir de plus pur"; "notre planète [est] sans autre importance que sa nécessité symétrique dans l'oeuvre"; "la Loi nous [bénit] de seconde ou de troisième main"(41). Thirdly, there is a vast difference between the element of 'purpose' introduced by Laforgue into his view of the universe here, and the conceptions of his master Hartmann. For all his savage attacks on Christianity and the Christian God, Hartmann's 'Unconscious' differs scarcely if at all from the providential divinity of Christianity; he has thrown God out the front door only to let him in again by the back! He admits explicitly in fact

that "entre un théisme intelligent et la philosophie de l'Inconscient on ne saurait trouver une différence sérieuse de principes"(42), and claims: "je serais plus autorisé que Spinoza et quelques autres à faire usage du mot Dieu"(43). Above all, an absolute confidence in the infallibility and the 'wisdom' of the Unconscious penetrates every line of the work; Hartmann emphasizes this 'wisdom' over and over again, never tiring of repeating the same phrases:

> tout ce qui arrive se produit avec une absolue sagesse, avec une convenance parfaite, c'est-à-dire pour un but prévu par l'Inconscient infaillible, qui est en même temps l'absolue logique.(44)
>
> L'Inconscient a la sagesse absolue [...] l'Inconscient ne peut jamais se tromper, pas même douter ni hésiter.[sic] (45)(*)

Hartmann in fact almost worships his Unconscious, in its 'absolute wisdom', as the Christian his God. One can understand how, carried away by his chosen philosopher (and, to a slightly lesser extent, by a reading of Hegel, of Schelling and of Spencer), Laforgue could have been misled into a momentary adoption of a teleological view of the world; but he certainly does not follow Hartmann into the often comical detail of his extravagances. Moreover, in one respect he openly indulges in satire of his master. Obsessed with the

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(*) The extent to which Hartmann takes this conception of a divine Providence is quite comical. Attempting to explain how the Unconscious regulates every detail of history, and in particular how it "fait naître, au moment convenable, le génie prédestiné", he offers in a footnote the following elucidation: "Le moyen le plus naturel et le plus facile, que la nature semble suivre en cela, c'est de rassembler les deux êtres les plus propres à produire l'individualité désirée, et de leur inspirer l'amour qui doit, réalisant à leur insu le but poursuivi, engendrer par eux l'homme supérieur attendu." (La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, tome I, p. 419).

aim of finding some purpose, whatever it may be, at work in the universe, Hartmann imagines within the totality of the Unconscious (frequently called "l'Un-Tout") a manichean struggle between "la Volonté" and "l'Idée": existence, which is absolute evil, finds its source in "la Volonté", in blind, irrational Will; it is due to "un acte de déraison"(46); so the rational, purposive Idea brings about the birth of consciousness in order to struggle against and eventually annihilate the Will, and with it existence. Such is the result of an impossible attempt to fuse Schopenhauer and Hegel (to say nothing of trying to reconcile Schopenhauer and Leibniz); Hartmann's metaphysics rather resembles a puppet show, and it is no surprise to find a parody of this manichean struggle between Will and Idea in Laforgue's Salomé:

> Et d'autres clowns jouèrent l'Idée, la Volonté, l'Inconscient. L'Idée bavardait sur tout, la Volonté donnait de la tête contre les décors, et l'Inconscient faisait de grands gestes mystérieux comme un qui en sait au fond plus long qu'il n'en peut dire encore.(47)

The final comment to be made concerning Laforgue's adoption of a new teleology is that it is only temporary; his essay on L'Art moderne en Allemagne is the only place in his work where such a view of the world is clearly formulated. To explain this, it is necessary to invoke the circumstances in which this essay was written - Laforgue's total absorption for several days in a variety of works of philosophy, followed by a rapid notation of his own theories.(*)

(*) These circumstances are described in a letter to Charles Ephrussi: "Vous ai-je dit que dans ces vingt jours, enfermé, cloîtré dans ce château de Coblentz, j'avais infiniment pensé et travaillé? J'ai relu les esthétiques diverses, Hegel, Schelling, Saisset, Lévêque, Taine - dans un état de /

This absorption in German philosophy (inter alia) would suffice to explain those elements of Hegelian and Hartmannian metaphysics which are still present in his mind at the moment of writing. And it is significant that much else written around the same time, as well as later, contradicts this new-found teleological view.

But neither the 'Unconscious' as a source of inner wealth nor as a metaphysical reality is as important for Laforgue as its function as an imagined refuge from thought and responsibility. For Hartmann, it is the world itself and the category of existence which is 'evil' (le mal) (although, following Schopenhauer, he believes that suffering increases with the development of consciousness). Such too had been the view of Laforgue at an earlier stage(48); now, however, it is no longer existence or the world which is 'le mal', but thought or consciousness. As the 'Complainte propitiatoire à l'Inconscient' puts it:

> [...] délivrez-nous de la Pensée,
> Lèpre originelle, ivresse insensée,
>
> Radeau du Mal et de l'Exil;
> Ainsi soit-il.

The concept of the Unconscious as a remedy to excessive thought or rationalism has of course already been discussed; but now 'salvation' by the former is conceived of less as a

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/ cerveau inconnu depuis mes dix-huit ans à la bibl. nationale. Je me suis recueilli, et dans une nuit, de 10 au soir à 4 du matin, tel Jésus au Jardin des Oliviers, Saint Jean à Pathmos, Platon au cap Sunium, Bouddha sous le figuier de Gaza, j'ai écrit en dix pages les principes métaphysiques de l'Esthétique nouvelle, une esthétique qui s'accorde avec l'Inconscient de Hartmann, le transformisme de Darwin, les travaux de Helmholtz." (Letter of Dec. 1883, O.C., V, p. 60).

new enrichment than as a simple suppression of thought, an unconsciousness:

> l'homme porte la tache originelle et ineffaçable d'une certaine dose de conscience. - Elle n'est en général qu'une source de soucis que n'ont pas les animaux, les plantes, les minéraux -
>
> Tâchons du moins de discipliner cette réflexion pour notre bonheur.
>
> Atténuons par l'habitude de la paresse, des griseries du rêve ou des paradis artificiels, la conscience (angoisse, doute, gêne, etc.) dans le Présent.(49)(*)

Equally important for Laforgue is the notion of fatality, of universal determinism, which had been vital also to the system of Hartmann(**). Alongside this imagined abdication of thought, one finds also in Laforgue an attempted abdication of responsibility for his decisions and his acts. "Que votre inconsciente Volonté / Soit faite dans l'éternité", is his playful prayer in the 'Complainte propitiatoire à l'Inconscient'; or as Pierrot says in the 'Complainte de Lord Pierrot':

(*) The all-important symbol of the Aquarium performs a dual function: it stands both for the inner richness of the Unconscious, and for a deliverance from thought. Cf. the following passage from Laforgue's notes: "A l'aquarium de Berlin, devant le regard atone, gavé, sage, bouddhique des crocodiles, des pithons, des ophites... Comme je comprends ces vieilles races d'Orient qui avaient épuisé tous les sens, tous les tempéraments, toutes les métaphysiques, et qui finissent par adorer, béatifier comme symbole du Nirvana promis ces regards nuls dont ne ne peut dire s'ils sont plus infinis qu'immuables." (Fragment publ. in La Revue Bleue, 15 June 1895. Reprinted, with some errors, in Mélanges posthumes, p. 35).

(**) Cf. "On peut être trompé sans doute par l'apparente liberté des individus. Mais [...] les philosophes modernes sont d'accord sur le problème de la liberté de la volonté. Ils ont tous déclaré qi'il ne peut être question d'une liberté empirique des résolutions particulières, dans le sens d'un libre arbitre absolu. Chaque détermination de la volonté, comme tout autre phénomène de la nature, est soumise à la loi de la causalité." (La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, tome I, p. 410.)

> Jonglons avec les entités,
> Pierrot s'agite et Tout le mène!
> Laissez faire, laissez passer;
> Laissez passer, et laissez faire;
> Le semblable, c'est le contraire.

Time and again in his correspondence, Laforgue excuses his own weaknesses or failure to act by a half-serious "tout est écrit", adding on one occasion: "C'est le raisonnement que je fais maintenant en toute chose"(50). And in a perfectly serious vein, he speaks in several prose passages of the consolation and relief of abandoning oneself to the 'maternal' care of the Unconscious:

> Comme on est bien, quel état délicieux d'existence, quand on s'est bien pénétré de la nécessité de la Fatalité universelle et minutieuse, inexorable [...]. Berce-moi, roule-moi vaste fatalité! (51)(*)

Through such a belief, Laforgue attempts also to come to an acceptance of his own 'nothingness', as well as to an ultimate acceptance of the realities (and necessities) of sexual love - the dominant theme of Les Complaintes. The former aim can be seen in a number of notes, of which the following is typical:

> Je suis l'atome dans l'infini, l'atome dans l'éternel, le soupir dans l'ouragan déchaîné, une force équivalente à un souffle dans les puissances formidablement brutales du mécanisme universel. - Je ne suis rien. - Je me laisse porter, - rien ne m'étonne.(51A)

Yet such an attitude of fatalism is in fact no less nihilistic

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(*) That this will to believe in such a determinism represents a deliberate attempt to escape from both thought and responsibility is evident also from the following passage: "S'il est possible d'atténuer la conscience dans le présent, on peut l'annihiler dans l'avenir: prévision, attente, par le culte devenu habituel de la Fatalité (voir les orientaux) [...]." (Fragment publ. in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Feb. 1892, pp. 50-51. Laforgue's italics.) Cf. also: "la bonne Loi [i.e. the Unconscious] m'a ravi du monde de la réflexion, du raisonnement, du calcul, des préméditations pour l'en allé à la dérive sur les jourdains de l'Inconscient [...]." (Mélanges posthumes, p. 17).

than Laforgue's earlier cries of anguish. "Tout est écrit, - à quoi bon se remuer?", he writes (52). And again:

> O siècles, allez - vivotez - tout simplement votre petit bonhomme de chemin, sans plus que vos aînés vous inquiéter d'un lendemain. Tout va.
> Laissez faire, laissez passer épanouissement, nihilisme, amour, renoncement, amour du néant, art, extirpations du vouloir, suicides, écoles, etc...
> L'Univers farà aveuglément da se
> (Ah! pauvre usine au capitaliste infini). (53)

Such is the course of Laforgue's deliberate (or would-be) anti-intellectualism; through such concepts as the above, adapted from Hartmann's Philosophie de l'Inconscient, Laforgue sought to escape from the consequences of the 'ravages of thought', from the conclusions of his youthful nihilistic view of the world, and above all from the sense of universal futility which had plagued him. In this aim, however, he was only partially successful. In the works of 1886-87, the Unconscious plays only a minor rôle; but even during the period of his greatest preoccupation with this concept - the time of Les Complaintes and L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune - many of the themes of Le Sanglot de la Terre continue to find expression in Laforgue's work; the world view which forms the backdrop to these new volumes remains fundamentally the same as before. It is the expression and formulation of this view which changes: irony and control take the place of youthful naïvety, despair gives way to an attempt at resignation (finding expression in the pose of the dandy-dilettante), and anguish mutates into ennui.(*)

(*) For example, there is the same awareness of the insignificance of man and the earth, but expressed now in a semi-humorous vein: "Qu'il est petit dans la Nature, / Le chemin de fer Paris-Ceinture!" ('Complainte sur certains temps déplacés'). There is the same obsession with death which /

The terms spleen and ennui recur like leitmotive in Les Complaintes and successive works, as in Laforgue's correspondence from the beginning of 1882 onwards. The causes of this mood are various. In part, it derives simply from the dullness and routine of his life at court in Germany. Perhaps most of all, it derives from Laforgue's solitude, and in particular from his failure to find the companion he so needs ("Ennui, Célibat de la terre", he exclaims in one passage(54)). But spleen is also a 'domestication' of metaphysical anguish, a product of the same constant meditation on the 'vanity' of all things (and even of the very fact of excessive meditation):

> Primo: mes grandes angoisses métaphysiques
> Sont passées à l'état de chagrins domestiques;
>
> Deux ou trois spleens locaux.(55)

> Je m'ennuie, voilà tout. Je sens le vide de tout, de l'amour, de la gloire, de l'art, de la métaphysique.
>
> Il est des jours où l'on s'égaie à se dire que l'universelle vie n'est qu'un kaléidoscope transitoire, - et à d'autres jours que, sans la rétine de nos cerveaux humains, ce kaléidoscope ne serait que

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Cont. from previous page:
/ renders futile all activity (the margins of Laforgue's MSS are full of sketches of skeletons and skulls). There is even a meditation by Time itself upon the absurdity of the activity to which it and Space are condemned ('Complainte du Temps et de sa commère l'Espace'). And in the recapitulatory 'Complainte des complaintes' there is the same challenge, albeit in a semi ironical mode, to the universe to justify itself: "Et nous, sous l'Art qui nous bâtonne, / Sisyphes par persuasion, / Flûtant des christs les vaines fables, / Au cabestan de l'incurable / POURQUOI! - Pourquoi?"

For L'Imitation, cf. the chorus of Pierrots who affirm their conviction (in 'Pierrots', V): "Que ce bas monde de scandale / N'est qu'un des mille coups de dé // Du jeu que l'Idée et l'Amour, / Afin sans doute de connaître / Aussi leur propre raison d'être, / Ont jugé bon de mettre au jour." And in 'Locution des Pierrots', XIV: "Je connais l'Histoire, / Et puis la Nature, / Ces foires / Aux ratures."

> vibrations. [...]
> Mais, voilà, je m'ennuie, parce que je vois que tout est vide et mensonge et apparence et spleen.(56)

Moreover, whilst Laforgue's 'Complaintes' are in part laments for the poet himself, they are also laments for mankind, for the human condition in general; the 'Complainte du soir des Comices agricoles' concludes with the line: "O Terre, ô terre, ô race humaine, / Vous me faites bien de la peine."; the 'Complainte du pauvre corps humain' has as its refrain: "Voyez l'homme, voyez! / Si ça n'fait pas pitié!"; whilst the conclusion of the fig-tree in the 'Complainte des voix sous le Figuier bouddhique' is: "Pauvres fous, vraiment pauvres fous!". The Schopenhauerian (and Buddhistic) attitude of universal 'pity' which is that of Laforgue in many of these 'complaintes' is itself a discrete form of condemnation (of 'God' or of the 'Unconscious'), a continuing indictment of the natural order. Whilst at the same time Laforgue's irony tends to perform the function of a continuing negation, a 'cancelling out' (and this applies at times even to the concept of the Unconscious). It may even be that his distortion of language, and his tendency to reject conventional vocabulary and meaning, reflect Laforgue's belief in the metaphysical absence of 'meaning'(*).

(*) The case for a relationship between the nihilism and the humour of Laforgue has been most eloquently argued by Marie-Jeanne Durry in her sympathetic and valuable study of the poet: "On peut être pessimiste et spirituel, on peut saisir à la fois le néant des choses et leur drôlerie. Il y a tout un Laforgue fureteur et curieux, qui attrape les ridicules et s'amuse des historiettes." (Jules Laforgue, Paris, Seghers ('Poètes d'aujourd'hui'), pp. 61-62). "Le désaccord entre lui et le monde, entre son deuil et son rire, sa tendresse et ses refus, sa gravité et sa pantomime, il le fait passer dans ses vers où le désaccord devient discord." (ibid., p. 116). "Laforgue, lui, parodie comme il respire. C'est la revanche de son universelle déception, le passe-temps de sa fantaisie et l'un des cache-cache de ses idées noires. C'est aussi un jeu de lettré triste, dans une civilisation vieillie [...]." (ibid., p.127).

In L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune, the moon, already an important symbol in Les Complaintes, is the subject of a veritable 'cult', the title recalling the mediaeval Imitation of Christ. But Laforgue's cult is of a 'negative' divinity: the Moon is a symbol of sterility, of non-being, and of the absence of thought, of consciousness (it is also to some extent a sexual symbol, embracing both sterility and virginity). In the poem 'Climat, faune et flore de la lune', the latter is addressed as: "Radeau du Nihil aux quais seuls de nos nuits", and in 'Litanies des derniers quartiers de la Lune' it is: "Vortex-nombril / Du Tout-Nihil [...] / O Chanaan / Du non Néant". The Moon's devotees are the Pierrots, the white-faced clowns, "dandys de la Lune"(57), whose philosophy is summed up in the line: "Mais la tribu s'accroît, de ces vieilles pratiques / De l'A QUOI BON?"(58), and whose attitude to the vicissitudes of life is a cultivated indifference: "L'art de tout est l'Ainsi soit-il; / Et [...] le beau rôle / Est de vivre de but en blanc / Et [...] de hausser à tout les épaules"(59). Much of this is light-hearted banter, but it contains also, in a wryly comical form, much of the philosophy which lies behind Laforgue's clowning and behind his pose of the dandy-dilettante: "vois-tu, Pierrot pantin de lettres c'est la tristesse éternelle des choses"(60).(*)

(*) Laforgue was fascinated by clowns; in Berlin, he would even at times go to the circus five nights in a row. Cf. his letter to Mme Mültzer, Feb. 1882, O.C., IV, p. 123: "Les clowns me paraissent arrivés à la vraie sagesse. Je devais être clown, j'ai manqué ma destinée."

(iv) The Impossibility of choosing: Pierrot and the fear of commitment; the unreality of the self.

In the final poem of L'Imitation de Notre-Dame de la Lune, Laforgue exclaims:

> Mais! j'ai peur de la vie
> Comme d'un mariage!
> Oh! vrai, je n'ai pas l'âge
> Pour ce beau mariage!... (61)

These lines sum up the chief dilemma which will be debated in the remaining years of his life. Behind Pierrot's clowning and the pose of the dandy-dilettante - the mask he presented to the world - lies a kind of moral paralysis, an inability to commit himself resolutely to any cause, to any course of action. He himself puts the problem squarely in a letter to Henry of 1882 describing his 'spleen':

> Et je m'embête, voilà.
> Heureusement j'aime les vers, les livres, les vrais tableaux, les bonnes eaux-fortes, des coins de nature, des toilettes de femmes, des types imprévus... Bref, tout le kaléidoscope de la vie.
> Mais on est fini et bien misérable au fond quand la vie n'a pour vous que l'intérêt d'un kaléidoscope, n'est-ce pas? (62)(*)

Des Fleurs de bonne volonté and the Derniers Vers reveal an increasingly acute awareness of the untenability and unsatisfactoriness of the life the poet has led to date, and an increasingly determined effort to face up to this question of 'commitment'. They bear witness to a struggle within Laforgue to escape from the 'metaphysical intoxication' of his youth and its consequent nihilism, to escape from

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(*) Cf. also Des Fleurs de bonne volonté, XII, 'Dimanches':
"Fuir? où aller, par ce printemps?
Dehors, dimanche, rien à faire...
Et rien à faire non plus dedans...
Oh! rien à faire sur la Terre!..."

his obsession with absolutes and with the idea of death, towards an acceptance of the relative, of the transitory, of compromise; and to a struggle also to achieve emotional maturity, to put aside his "inutile coeur d'adolescent"(63), and to build "un pont entre [son] Coeur et le Présent"(64). The skies remain as empty as before, the world is governed by impersonal laws ("tout Lois sans appel [...] / Et non un brave toit de famille"(65)) - but now there is a determined effort to accept this relative, transitory existence in all its imperfection. The poet recognizes now the paralysing consequences of his earlier absorption: he has "perdu à ce jeu de purs et sûrs instincts"(66) and has been left "dos voûté sous l'A quoi Bon?"(67). He desires to be free from such preoccupations:

> Oh! m'en aller, me croyant libre,
> Désattelé des bibliothèques,
> Avec tous ces passants cuvant en équilibre
> Leurs cognacs d'Absolu, leurs pâtés d'Intrinsèque!...
> (68)(*)

This is the message in particular of Le Concile féerique, composed, like much of the Derniers Vers, by a rearrangement of material from the unpublished Des Fleurs de bonne volonté:

> Mais, nul Spectateur éternel...
> Ah! la terre humanitaire
> N'en est pas moins terre-à-terre!
> Au contraire. [...]
>
> Hé! pas choisi
> D'y naître, et hommes;
> Mais nous y sommes,
> Tenons-nous-y! (69)

The poem traces a course from 'metaphysical intoxication' to an acceptance of the relative, of the transitory, of the

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(*) The reference to 'libraries' is interesting (the theme recurs in Laforgue's Hamlet). Cf. also his invocation to the moon in 'Litanies des derniers quartiers de la Lune' (in L'Imitation): "Néant, la Mecque / Des bibliothèques".

purely physical or material - and of the inevitable, the determined. All the same, this acceptance is set within the framework of an ever-present awareness of death; and the poet's resignation is at times tinged with bitter regret, as such lines as the following reveal:

> Cueillons sans espoir et sans drame;
> La chair vieillit après les roses;
> Ah! parcourons le plus de gammes!
> Vrai, il n'y a pas autre chose.(69A)

Much of Laforgue's problem, of course, is simply that of adjustment to living in a world without 'God' in any form, a 'world without transcendence', in which the here-and-now is the only dimension. But he sees this also as a problem facing the whole of his age:

> Comment ne voit-on pas que c'est là notre Terre?
> Et qu'il n'y a que ça? que le reste est impôts
> Dont vous n'avez pas même à chercher l'à-propos!
> Il faut répéter ces choses! Il faut qu'on tette
> Ces choses! Jusqu'à ce que la Terre se mette,
> Voyant enfin que tout vivotte sans témoin,
> A vivre aussi pour elle, et dans son petit coin! (70)

And in the original version of these lines in Des Fleurs de bonne volonté, Laforgue had added a note of self-justification: "Et c'est bien dans ce sens, moi, qu'au lieu de me taire, / Je persiste à narrer mes petites affaires."(70A)

Paramount in this struggle, and within a broader metaphysical framework, is an effort on the part of Laforgue to accept the 'brutal' realities of sex and a limited, purely human love(*). The 'woman problem' had already been the dominant theme in Les Complaintes; in Des Fleurs de bonne volonté, Le Concile féerique and the Derniers Vers the

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(*) Laforgue himself was fully aware that this struggle formed part of a wider, philosophical issue. Cf., for example, the 'Complainte des voix sous le Figuier bouddhique', where his meditation on the rôle of woman as an instrument of reproduction leads on to the broader opposition: "Vie ou Néant! choisir. Ah! quelle discipline!"

complex sex-love-marriage lies at the very centre of the debate which runs through these works. Pierrot is tired of playing his rôle, but afraid of abandoning it. More and more, Laforgue comes to see marriage - in the form of a relationship of complete equality and harmony - as the only satisfactory solution. But can such a solution be found, and can he take the step of 'committing' himself to the relativistic values and the compromises of everyday existence which such a step entails?

> Pas d'absolu; des compromis;
> Tout est pas plus, tout est permis. (71)

This is the urgent struggle of which the Derniers Vers in particular are the record. The details of this personal struggle lie outside the scope of the present study; two features, however, of Laforgue's nihilistic view of love and attitude of rejection shown towards women are worth mentioning.

Laforgue's attitude is determined by causes which are both philosophical and social. At first, it springs largely from the conceptions of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, in which individual men and women are merely pathetic victims of a cosmic force ('génie de l'espèce' or 'Unconscious') which ensnares them in an illusion of love and beauty; men and women do not choose to love, nor do they choose whom they love; they are driven by forces beyond their control, of which they understand nothing but which determine them and their actions completely - forces which are part of a general pattern of universal determinism. Laforgue's outlook is clearly expressed in the passage:

> ô femme, nous te salissons ainsi nous nihilistes parce que tu es Eve, l'instrument maudit, un peu sphinx par ta mère, et une fausse soeur, on ne peut se confier à toi car tu ne nous aimes pas pour nous, et pour toi exclusivement, tu as d'autres intérêts, des intérêts de maison divine. Tu nous dupes pour Quelqu'un. Tu es vendue aux intérêts de l'Administration. (71A)

Paradoxically, it is also this same conception which, ultimately, helps to bring Laforgue to a partial acceptance of existing reality; as the 'Complainte des voix sous le Figuier bouddhique' states on a light-hearted note: "O femme, mammifère à chignon, ô fétiche, / On t'absout; c'est un Dieu qui par tes yeux nous triche". But it is only a partial acceptance, at least right until the end, and for much of the time Laforgue is torn between the two extremes of a brutal and nihilistic lucidity concerning the 'illusoriness' of love and a revulsion against these brutal forces of determinism, and the desire to be 'duped', to accept that 'illusion'. It is the passionate struggle between these two extremes which gives much of its dramatic tension to his last volume, and which perhaps helps to explain the many hesitations and, at times, apparent cynicism in his relationship with Leah Lee, the woman he was eventually to marry(*).

(*) Cf. the letter he wrote to Théo. Ysaye where he attributes his love for Leah Lee, rather than another woman, solely to 'chance': "Ah! Je suis plus que jamais l'esclave du sort.[...] Je me suis dit: à quoi tient notre sort! d'émouvants (ou d'effrayants) hasards, un sourire fortuit dans un village et nous devenons shakespeariens, notre destinée se fixe. [...] dans le fond, il n'y a pour nous que les petites Adrienne au bon coeur, aux longs cils, au juvénile et éphémère sourire, les petites Adrienne à la peau enchanteresse, que le hasard (et tout n'est-il pas hasard?) a conduites sur notre chemin. Oui, tout est hasard, car n'y eût-il pas existé d'Adrienne, il y aurait eu une Leah; n'y eût-il pas eu de Leah, il y aurait eu une Nini, et ainsi de suite." (30 Sept. 1886, O.C., V, pp. 162-3.)

But Laforgue's attitude towards women and towards love is also coloured by the social conditions of his time; it arises from a rejection of the particular relationships between men and women consecrated by the bourgeois society of the late nineteenth century. This was in fact a period of increasing oppression (or, as Laforgue will say, 'enslavement') of women by a male-dominated society - a situation which was soon to produce a reaction in the various movements for female emancipation. Time and again in his notes, Laforgue returned to the questions of the social status of women and existing relationships between the sexes. In part his rejection was simply of the concepts of 'conquest' and domination and of the extremes to which (in his view) these had been carried in his own time(*). But he also saw clearly the status of women in nineteenth-century bourgeois society and the consequences to which their 'enslavement' had led. Far from being an equal of man, woman has been made "un être à part, inconnu, n'ayant d'autre arme que son sexe"(72). But she has profited from this situation by making of her sex a mystique:

> comme on l'a laissée dans l'esclavage, la paresse, sans autre occupation et arme que son sexe, elle l'a hypertrophié, et est devenue le Féminin, toilettes, bijoux, faux-derrières ou plates tuniques grecques, romans, drames, décolletages, nus, paquets de lettres parfumées, lunes de miel [...] elle [s'est] fait une humanité à part, chaque an, chaque saison une nouvelle mode, un nouvel art de séduction, et des variétés d'amour, tête, coeur, chair, platoniques, amours mûres, etc., etc... (73)

(*) Cf. such a passage as the following: "En général, dans la société moderne, l'homme ne se soucie pas d'être aimé, compris (c'est si difficile à vérifier, si oiseux); il aime, fait la cour et possède. Etre aimé, pour lui, c'est plaire, n'être pas rejeté. Etre aimé, c'est être préféré aux autres soupirants, gentlemen comme lui." (Mélanges posthumes, pp. 54-55).

She has even turned man from his contemplation of eternal mysteries, has even perverted his religions and turned them to her ends:

> Maintenant elle a pris cette oeuvre de l'Homme, et son génie pratique et quotidien en a chassé l'Infini primitif pour y installer un laboratoire d'idéal, de mystère et de remords, à la gloire, à la culture et aux intérêts de son sexe. (74)(*)

Laforgue, however, will have none of this: "tout ça est faux et n'a pas de fin et conduit à l'extinction des nerfs. [...] Avec la Femme nous avons jusqu'ici joué à la poupée. Voilà trop longtemps que ça dure."(75) He cries out in the Derniers Vers against the 'purple mystery' in which sex has been enshrouded,and its corollary, the hypocritical bourgeois cult of virginity, characterised with heavy irony in the lines:

> O merveille qu'on n'a su que cacher!
> Si pauvre et si brûlante et si martyre!
> Et qu'on n'ose toucher
> Qu'à l'aveugle, en divin délire!
>
> O merveille.
> Reste cachée, idéale violette [...].(75A)

It is necessary to 'reform' women, "leur faire passer le goût des bijoux, en faire véritablement nos compagnes égales, nos amies intimes"(76). He pleads for a relationship of equality, of fraternity and of partnership between men and women; woman should be a co-worker alongside man, "un associé":

> Mon Dieu, que l'Idéal
> La dépouillât de ce rôle d'ange!
> Qu'elle adoptât l'homme comme égal
> Oh! que ses yeux ne parlent plus d'Idéal,
> Mais simplement d'humains échanges!
> En frères et soeurs par le coeur [...]. (76A)

(*) Laforgue comes close to suggesting the thesis which Denis de Rougemont was to propound in L'Amour et l'Occident. In Pan et la Syrinx he has his Pan say to Syrinx, in adoration: "Vos grands yeux annoncent quelque chose que j'appellerai le christianisme"! (In Moralités légendaires, O.C., III, pp. 201-2)

> O jeunes filles, quand serez-vous nos frères, nos
> frères intimes sans arrière-pensée d'exploitation! (77)

Laforgue even expressed the idea that, in the absence of God, woman should help to make a home of this earth:

> Les dieux s'en vont. Leur père
> S'en meurt. - O Jeune Femme,
> Refais-nous une Terre
> Selon ton corps sans âme!
>
> Ouvre-nous tout Ton Sexe! et, sitôt, l'Au-delà
> Nous est nul! (77A)

But all this expresses Laforgue's ideal (and one which, ultimately, he believed he had found in Leah Lee); confronted with present social realities, his attitude is one of continuing rejection.

Moreover, the issue of 'commitment' is further complicated by the appearance in Laforgue's work, from Des Fleurs de bonne volonté onwards, of a new theme: the multiplicity of the poet's moi, and his consequent doubts about the reality of anything he can call his 'self' - the overall result of which is a strengthening of that moral paralysis which we have been discussing:

> Or, pas le coeur de me marier,
> Etant, moi, au fond, trop méprisable! [...]
>
> C'est pourquoi je vivotte, vivotte,
> Bonne girouette aux trent'-six saisons,
> Trop nombreux pour dire oui ou non... (78)
>
> Comment lui dire: "Je vous aime"?
> Je me connais si peu moi-même. (79)

In part, this new form of moral paralysis is a consequence of constant self-analysis, a theme which runs through the whole of nineteenth-century French literature and which was stressed by Bourget in his Essais de psychologie contemporaine. But it also arises from Laforgue's conception of the 'Unconscious' as a vast inner dimension of the mind: self-

knowledge and self-possession are impossible when nine-tenths (or infinitely more) of ourselves is hidden below the level of consciousness; and this in turn renders involvement with other people, 'commitment' to others, impossible. Whilst a third source of this paralysis is to be found in the conception of the self which Laforgue derives from the combined influences of Tainean psychology and Hartmann's Unconscious. He is led to conclude that each individual mind or self (moi), far from being a stable, permanent reality, is merely something fluid and perpetually changing, a succession of moments in the evolution of the omnipresent Unconscious:

> Chaque homme est selon son moment dans le temps, son milieu de race et de condition sociale, son moment d'évolution individuelle, un certain clavier sur lequel le monde extérieur joue d'une certaine façon. Mon clavier est perpétuellement changeant [...]. (80)(*)

The Tainean influence in these lines is unmistakable; but no less striking is Laforgue's conception, following Hartmann, of the passivity of the individual(**). The same idea is

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(*) In similar manner, Barrès will later attempt to go back upon his early nihilistic 'Culte du Moi' by denying the reality of the self - basing himself at first on Hartmann's conception of the 'Unconscious', from which he later develops the idea that the only reality is the 'soul' of the group of 'race'.

(**) This is most evident in their respective comments on artistic creation. Cf. Hartmann: "L'homme de génie reçoit ses inspirations, ou plutôt les subit sans les avoir voulues [...] le génie [...] doit ses conceptions à l'Inconscient." (La Philos. de l'Inconscient, tome I, pp. 307-8). Laforgue's own theoretical writings entirely support such a view (although in practice his own literary activity contradicts it).

On Hartmann's denial of the reality of the self, cf. his statement that the idea of the moi "n'est qu'une apparence produite dans le cerveau, et n'a pas plus de vérité [...] que l'idée de l'honneur ou du droit, par exemple. La seule réalité qui réponde à l'idée que je me fais de la cause intérieure de mon activité, est celle de l'être qui n'est pas un individu, de l'Un-Tout inconscient." (La Philos. de l'Inconscient, tome II, pp. 458-9).

expressed on a lighter note in Des Fleurs de bonne volonté:

> Oyez, au physique comme au moral,
> Ne suis qu'une colonie de cellules
> De raccroc; et ce sieur que j'intitule
> Moi, n'est, dit-on, qu'un polypier fatal! (81)

It is in the Derniers Vers, however, that the theme of the multiplicity or unreality of the poet's moi appears with greatest urgency, as one of the key themes of the work:

> Bref, j'allais me donner d'un "Je vous aime"
> Quand je m'avisai non sans peine
> Que d'abord je ne me possédais pas bien moi-même.
>
> (Mon Moi, c'est Galathée aveuglant Pygmalion!
> Impossible de modifier cette situation.)
>
> Ainsi donc, pauvre, pâle et piètre individu
> Qui ne croit à son Moi qu'à ses moments perdus,
> Je vis s'effacer ma fiancée [...]. (82)(*)

But before this, the theme receives its most extensive illustration in the 'Moralité légendaire', Hamlet, ou les suites de la piété filiale(83). Laforgue was haunted all his life by the figure of Hamlet; the greater part of the dilemma recorded in Des Fleurs de bonne volonté and the Derniers Vers could be summed up in Hamlet's "to be or not to be", whilst a number of the poems of the former volume have epigraphs from Shakespeare's Hamlet, as also does the final section of the Derniers Vers and the work as a whole).

(*) Cf. also F.B.V., LI, 'Cas rédhibitoire (Mariage)': "Mais peut-il être question / D'aller tirer des exemplaires / De son individu si on / N'en a pas une idée plus claire?..."

In the original form of the above-quoted lines in F.B.V. (XXX, 'Dimanches'), the line "Qui ne croit à son Moi..." was: "Qui ne croit en son Moi...". The change of preposition is significant: the original version suggests a lack of confidence in himself on the part of the poet; the final version, an absence of belief in the very existence of any 'self'.

The reference to Galathea and Pygmalion (the Greek sculptor who created a statue of a woman so beautiful that he fell in love with it and was never again able to love another, real woman) seems to suggest that the poet's obsession with metaphysical problems has cut him off from real people and the values of everyday life. It is worth noting a difference here also from the text of F.B.V. (XXX, 'Dimanches'): "Mon Moi..." instead of "Chez moi...", and "Impossible de modifier..." in place of "Ah! faudrait modifier", suggesting a much greater sense of hopelessness in the final version.

Laforgue's Hamlet is the most important of the Moralités légendaires and the one which contains most of its author. The physical portrait of Hamlet, certain features of his dress, his artistic interests, his philosophical ideas, are all basically those of Laforgue himself; and he also shares the latter's 'metaphysical intoxication', his obsession with the 'absurdity' of existence (the "point de départ of both his meditations and his "aberrations"(84)), as also Laforgue's 'spleen' and 'ennui':

> Et puis, des mots, des mots, des mots! Ce sera là ma devise tant qu'on ne m'aura pas démontré que nos langues riment bien à une réalité transcendante. (85)

And Hamlet too has had at one time "[sa] folie d'apôtre, comme Çakya-Mouni fils de roi"(86).

But the most striking feature of all in Hamlet's character is its apparent instability - the rapidity with which he passes from one point of view to its opposite, and the multiplicity of attitudes, and even of personalities, which he displays(*). He alternates in the space of seconds between self-exaltation and self-reproach (and then goes on to philosophically excuse himself: "D'ailleurs, tout est hérédité"), between orgies of sadistic destruction and fits of remorse, between pity and cynical indifference(**). He is paralysed by a sense of the 'vanity' of all activity; as

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(*) Significantly, the poem in which the theme of the multiplicity of the 'self' first appears is the autobiographical 'Avertissement' to F.B.V., dated "Copenhague, Elseneur. 1er janvier 1886". Laforgue made a visit to Elsinor in Denmark, supposedly the town of Hamlet, at the beginning of 1886.

(**) Cf. amongst other examples of Hamlet's apparently gratuitous and sadistic cruelty, his behaviour while out hunting. The forest with its "mille rumeurs printanières" (i.e. symbolising life) "le ravissait, telle l'eût ravi une chambre de torture de ses mille grésillements sur les réchauds!" He finds delight in an orgy of destruction of all living /

he puts it in an ironical version of the attitude of the dilettante as defined by Bourget: "Je comprends tout, j'adore tout, et veux tout féconder. C'est pourquoi, comme je l'ai gravé au mur de mon lit en un distique également rossard: Ma rare faculté d'assimilation / Contrariera le cours de ma vocation."(87)(*) But Hamlet is the victim also of a paralysing self-consciousness which expresses itself in an unceasing irony, directed at himself as much as at anything else. One can say of Hamlet, in fact, as one critic has said of Laforgue, that he "parodie comme il respire"(88); he no sooner entertains or expresses an idea than he feels compelled to parody, to 'debunk' that very same idea. He is thus reduced to playing an unbroken series of <u>rôles</u>, fully aware that they are such - and becomes the author of a whole series of apparent 'actes gratuits' remarkably reminiscent of that of Gide's Lafcadio. Of these rôles, that which Hamlet most aspires to play is that of the artist; the cause of vengeance for his father's death is subordinated to that of art, and his deepest desire is to achieve success in the eyes of the world:

> Alors, tu crois que, devant un public de capitale et aux lumières, l'effet serait renversant? Et qu'on me regarderait passer dans les rues en s'étonnant de mon allure triste? Et que d'aucuns se tueraient devant l'énigme de ma vie? (89)

Yet this too is a rôle, and Hamlet suddenly abandons it, and all else, to go knowingly to his (suicidal?) death at the

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(*) Cf. infra the discussion of Bourget's definition of 'dilettantism' in the chapter on Barrès. Laforgue's /Cont.

Cont. from previous page:
/ creatures: "Ah! c'était LE DÉMON DE LA RÉALITÉ! l'allégresse de constater que la justice n'est qu'un mot, que tout est permis - et pour cause, nom de Dieu! - contre les êtres bornés et muets." (<u>O.C.</u>, III, p. 34).

hands of Laërtes, uttering as he expires the words of the dying Nero: "Qualis... artifex... pereo!"(90)(*)

Laforgue's Hamlet presents a brilliant portrait of a nihilist, one which contains a great deal of Laforgue himself. Yet the treatment from beginning to end is one of parody, with Laforgue's irony being directed above all - by implication - at himself; the result is that even his own nihilism is not taken seriously. But on the other hand, nowhere in the work is there any more positive treatment of the fundamental issues of love, marriage and the commitment to 'life' generally; if one is to draw any conclusion at all from the work, it must be that Laforgue has still not extricated himself from the moral impasse in which he found himself.

Ultimately, in both Laforgue's life and literary work (if we take the Derniers Vers as his final statement), the decisive step was taken in favour of marriage and the 'commitment' it entailed. Yet a reading of the Derniers Vers shows up the precariousness of this final affirmation. The backdrop to the whole work is an atmosphere of profound pessimism, of isolation, of uncertainty, even of impending

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(*) Exactly the same words were to be used by Barrès in the final volume of his Culte du Moi, in which he attempted to bid farewell to the debilitating practices of his 'culte'. Indeed, Qualis artifex pereo! was originally to have been the title of this final volume.

Cont. from previous page:
/ reference to Bourget in the fragment 'A propos de Hamlet' is interesting: " - A Paris, Altesse, vous le savez, il y a pour votre légende spéciale, Paul Bourget qui la cultive et l'aggrave, avec assez de correction dependant pour s'arrêter (feignant de se cabrer) devant le Nihilisme [...]." (O.C., III, Appendix, p. 263).

doom, symbolised in the desolation and destruction of autumn(*). Right up to the final lines of the last section of the work, the conclusion appears to be a continuing rejection and negation; never before has Laforgue's irony been so strong or so savage as here, and the function it performs is again to negate, to cancel out any apparently positive conclusion to which the work might otherwise seem to point, any apparent resolution of the issues raised. Up to the last moment the 'message' of the Derniers Vers seems to be a passive acquiescence in sterility, in inaction, in misery, in solitude, and in death - an attitude once described by a critic of Laforgue as "spiritual defeatism"(91). There is even a momentary contemplation of suicide, and a call to destruction because of the very 'uselessness' and irrationality of existence:

> Alléluia, Terre paria!
> Les hommes de l'art
> Ont dit: "Vrai, c'est trop tard."
> Pas de raison,
> Pour ne pas activer sa crevaison.
>
> Aux armes, citoyens! Il n'y a plus de RAISON. (92)

Whilst even the poet's final affirmation in the closing lines of the work is encompassed within the framework of an ever-present awareness of death - a framework which,

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(*) The full significance for Laforgue of the themes of autumn and autumn winds can be gauged from the following passage:
"Toute l'incompréhensible, l'insaisissable désolation d'exil des automnes de ma vie qui me sont restés sur le coeur crève dans le vent qu'on entend aujourd'hui.
Rien, que je sache, ne comblerait la dévastation que ce vent a balayée en moi. - Une vallée de Josaphat d'ambitions inconnues. Je ne sais rien faire - je ne suis bon à rien. Je n'ai pas de but. - Rien, pourquoi je ferais un pas, aujourd'hui - ni musées, ni voyages, ni mers, ni femmes [...]."
(Fragment publ. in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Sept. 1891, p. 89).

while not depriving it of all force, certainly stresses its limited nature:

> Oh! qu'elle est là-bas, que la nuit est noire!
> Que la vie est une étourdissante foire!
> Que toutes sont créature, et que tout est routine!
>
> Oh! que nous mourrons!
>
> Eh bien, pour aimer ce qu'il y a d'histoires
> Derrière ces beaux yeux d'orpheline héroïne,
> O Nature, donne-moi la force et le courage
> De me croire en âge,
> O Nature, relève-moi le front!
> Puisque, tôt ou tard, nous mourrons... (93)(*)

Such at least is the evidence of Laforgue's literary work. Perhaps the reality was less dramatic than its poetic expression, or perhaps the element of confession is here

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(*) The image of life as a 'deafening fairground' is a frequent one in Laforgue; the term "créature" in the following line evokes the helplessness of human beings, pathetic victims of deterministic forces beyond their control; whilst the phrase "tout est routine" refers to the meaninglessness and mechanical aspect of existence.
The invocation to Nature in the last lines of the poem contains an obvious reference to Baudelaire's prayer to God in the poem 'Un Voyage à Cythère': "Ah! Seigneur! donnez-moi la force et le courage / De contempler mon coeur et mon corps sans dégoût!". Does it also contain an element of irony or parody, with 'Nature' being substituted for 'God'? If this is the case, then Laforgue's final resolution must seem all the more precarious as a result.

A similar overwhelmingly negative impression is left by Laforgue's volume of short stories entitled Moralités légendaires. These were written between Autumn 1883 and the beginning of 1887, but all were revised at the time of writing F.B.V. and the D.V., all the revisions producing an increased irony, through the addition of more extravagant, grotesque or incongruous detail. Most re-echo the themes of these two volumes; but all are characterised by a similar irony, sometimes savage (as in Le Miracle des Roses, a satire upon life in a fashionable spa), sometimes light-hearted and 'fantaisiste'. And in all of them - even where Laforgue treats of themes which are highly personal or which occur all through his poetry - the 'woman problem' (Lohengrin), the Unconscious (Salomé), the relationship between art and life (Pan et la Syrinx), the relationship between Laforgue's philosophical preoccupations and his personal problems (Persée et Andromède) - the effect is the same: Laforgue's irony serves to cancel out these themes or any apparently positive conclusions (it is nothing if not 'self-debunking'), or else, by reducing everything to the level of fantasy, to suspend any resolution of the issues involved.

subordinated to the needs of artistic creation, in particular the need to create a new, dramatic form of poetic expression - although the evidence of Laforgue's correspondence suggests otherwise, giving a clear enough idea of the long period of hesitation and indecisiveness that preceded his final decision to marry.(94) There is, however, one other factor which to date has been left out of the discussion, and which must now be considered: the importance in Laforgue's work of the theme of the 'outsider' and its influence upon his nihilistic outlook.

(v) The 'decadent' and the 'outsider'.

Laforgue was seen by his contemporaries as belonging to, and himself claimed adherence to, the group of self-styled 'decadent' poets and novelists(*). In fact, he took an ironical pride in being labelled a 'decadent', protesting vigorously when Paul Bourde, in a hostile article on "les poètes décadents" in Le Temps in 1885, failed to mention his name(95). This variety of 'decadentism', however, is superficial and unimportant from our point of view. It was chiefly Laforgue's poetic experimentation and search for originality in Les Complaintes - his ambition to "faire de l'original à tout prix"(96) -, along with his resulting 'obscurity', as the critics saw it, which caused him (in company with Verlaine and Mallarmé) to be thus denounced or

(*) For example, both Anatole Baju, founder-editor of Le Décadent, and the symbolist review La Plume claimed Laforgue as a decadent (Cf. 'Les Annales du Symbolisme', La Plume, 1 Jan. 1891). Whilst Huysmans, in the 1903 preface to that Bible of all good decadents, A rebours, claimed that Laforgue deserved to figure, along with Rimbaud, in des Esseintes' "florilège". (Admiration was mutual between Laforgue and Huysmans. Cf. Lettres à un ami, pp. 36, 38, 124, and O.C., V, pp. 89, 128, 140).

acclaimed, although he does also share the 'spleen' and lassitude of much decadent poetry: "Nous sommes le congrès des las", his Pierrots declare, as they invoke the Moon, symbol of non-being, "pilule des léthargies finales"(96A).

Much more important, however, is his explicit agreement with the analysis of his friend and mentor Bourget of modern 'decadence' as a social, philosophical and literary phenomenon rolled into one. He shares Bourget's belief that contemporary civilisation is moving rapidly towards a state of social disintegration and collapse, and of nervous breakdown, owing to the undermining of its common metaphysical (or religious) and ethical bases. "La civilisation nous détraque, plus d'équilibre", he notes, referring also to "le détraquement corps et âme d'aujourd'hui" and even to "la monstruosité de notre décadence"(97). He even cites Bourget on the quality of art in such a society:

> Comme l'a fait remarquer P. Bourget dans sa théorie de la décadence, à propos de Baudelaire: "Si les citoyens d'une décadence sont inférieurs comme ouvriers de la grandeur d'un pays, ne sont-ils pas très supérieurs comme artistes de l'intérieur de l'âme? S'ils sont malhabiles à l'action privée ou publique, n'est-ce point qu'ils sont trop habiles à la pensée solitaire?" (98)

Such "artistes de décadence" are of necessity "anarchistes, nihilistes [...] les seuls êtres qui ne reconnaissent plus aucune discipline ni de conscience, ni de santé, ni de société"(99); and Laforgue even claims at one point that the "artiste névrosé" and "détraqué" is the only type possible in the Paris of his day(100).

Laforgue's position concerning the rôle of art and the artist in a 'decadent' society is unequivocal; art is amoral and absolute, an end in itself:

> En art il s'agit d'être intéressant. [...] La morale n'a rien à voir avec l'art pur pas plus qu'avec l'amour pur. [...]
> Les êtres comme les civilisations hypertrophiés sont plus intéressants que les êtres, les civilisations équilibrés. Il s'agit de n'être pas médiocre. Il faut être un nouveau. Oui, le degré de bienfaisance est un critérium en morale, non en art, l'artiste étant un solitaire, un hypertrophié, de Shakespeare à Michel-Ange.(101)(*)

However, he certainly does not consider art to be 'absolute' in any mystical sense; on the contrary, he tends rather (at least at the time of Les Complaintes) to the view of Bourget and the decadents that in the modern world it can only be the distraction of a hyper-refined minority. From his early ambitions to write a work of prophecy, Laforgue rapidly evolved to the point of writing: "Aujourd'hui les vers ne sont plus que pour être lus en petit comité, de ci de là, pour les seuls initiés."(102) And a short time later:

> Voilà le but des vers. On a des amis spleenétiques du même spleen que nous. On distrait son spleen en faisant de ces curieuses choses rimées qu'on appelle des poésies (quel vieux mot!) et on en distrait le spleen de ses amis. [...] Publier des vers est un reste de bourgeoisisme. (103)

More important even than his views on art, however,

(*) The same idea is expressed in a lighter vein in the poem 'La Lune est stérile' (in L'Imitation): "L'Art est tout, du droit divin de l'Inconscience; / Après lui, le déluge! et son moindre regard / Est le cercle infini dont la circonférence / Est partout, et le centre immoral nulle part."
Laforgue sees the modern attitude to art as beginning with Baudelaire (the hero of decadents and symbolists alike); cf. this passage from his notes on the latter:
"Baudelaire
le premier il a rompu avec le public -
Les poètes s'adressaient au public - répertoire humain - lui le premier s'est dit:
la poésie sera chose d'initiés.
Je suis damné pour le public - Bon - le Public n'entre pas ici." (Fragment publ. in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, April 1891, p. 112. Reprinted, with minor alterations, in Mélanges posthumes, p. 115).

is Laforgue's conception of his own place in a society which, intellectually and socially, is on the road to disintegration. He represents one of the most striking examples in the literature of the last two decades of the nineteenth century of the 'outsider', the man who feels himself to be standing outside the society of his time. It is this sense of not belonging which both determines Laforgue's conception of the place of art in society, and is one of the key factors in his own nihilism.

Laforgue's profound sense of solitude has already been remarked upon; the relationship between this and his nihilism is clearly shown in a letter he wrote to Kahn from Cologne:

> Depuis deux jours j'erre dans les rues, dans les faubourgs et le long du Rhin [...], sans avoir parlé à âme qui vive [...], absolument seul... C'est alors que je patauge dans le noir! et que je suis plus nihiliste que nature! (104)

But this sense of solitude is not only personal; it also arises from the loss of all community of belief. In the early poem 'Noël sceptique', the poet laments his inability to share in the Christmas joy of those around him because he cannot share the communal faith(105).(*) The joy of others in fact plunges him into despair:

> Cette atmosphère de fête m'attriste au delà de la mort. Je ne me rappelle pas une heure de ma vie où la joie ne m'ait navré ou du moins attristé.
> La stupide humanité a besoin de fêtes (v. le chapitre des divertissements dans les Pensées de Pascal). (106)

More important, Laforgue feels himself to be an 'outcast', a 'pariah' - a theme running through the whole of his work. A minor variation occurs in the novel which he planned to

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(*) Here he expresses a feeling of guilt at this inability; later, the sense of regret for the lost faith will alternate with a charge of hypocrisy directed against bourgeois believers.

write during his early years in Paris, and on which he is known to have worked during his first few months in Germany: its title was to have been Un raté, and its autobiographical hero "un raté de génie" who "s'anaÿlse pour se trouver des symptômes de folie et finit par le suicide"(107). But the specific theme of the 'pariah' is there also from the start: "Je suis le paria de la famille humaine", Laforgue exclaims in Le Sanglot de la Terre(108); in Les Complaintes he ranges himself with "les christs déclassés et autres gens suspects" (109), whilst Pierrot feels himself to "de moins en moins localisé"(110); and in L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune the race of 'pierrots' is described as "[les] blancs parias" (111). Hamlet freely admits that he is 'but a pariah', and the tower in which he lives is described as a "tour paria", a "lépreuse sentinelle"(112). Whilst in Des Fleurs de bonne volonté one of the chief sources of the poet's 'spleen' is a sense of alienation from the world around him - a feeling which is at its most acute on Sundays as Laforgue, himself idle, sees those about him engaged in the (to him) meaningless routine of their daily existence; the irony of this situation is that it is at the moment when the poet feels most contempt for the hollow routine of the lives of others that he also feels most acutely his own isolation(*). Finally, the theme of the 'pariah' reappears with greater force than ever in the Derniers Vers. More than ever, as he contemplates a group of young girls going to church on Sunday, the poet feels himself to be an 'outsider', a 'polar bear',

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(*) Sunday, as a symbol of 'spleen', is one of the most important symbols in Laforgue's work. Two of the Complaintes have the word 'dimanche' in their title, and of the poems in F.B.V. 13 are entitled 'Dimanches', as are also two of the twelve sections of the D.V.

cut off from those around him by the destructive effects of his own rationalism:

> Ah! moi, je demeure l'Ours Blanc!
> Je suis venu par ces banquises
> Plus pures que les communiantes en blanc...
> Moi, je ne vais pas à l'église,
> Moi je suis le Grand Chancelier de l'Analyse,
> Qu'on se le dise. (113)

The central section of the work, 'Simple agonie' (VI), opens with the exclamation: "O paria!", words repeated four lines later; whilst the theme makes a further appearance in the final section of the Derniers Vers, under the name this time of "l'Attardé qui à la remorque traîne / Toute la misère du coeur et des choses".

It would be mistaken to attempt to find in Laforgue any clearly formulated political ideas or options; he is amongst the least politically involved of writers. Nevertheless it is possible to detect in his work certain sympathies or aversions - and in particular a revulsion from certain of what he felt to be the bourgeois values of his time; his sense of alienation is above all from the bourgeois society in the midst of which he lived. In part he is merely following a long-established literary tradition (dating back to the Romantics) of castigating the 'bourgeois' for his lack of culture; but it is above all the self-satisfaction of the bourgeoisie, in such marked contrast to his own anguish or sorrow, which revolts him. An early unpublished article speaks of the "inaltérable contentement de lui-même" of the bourgeois(114); while there are numerous later references to "les satisfaits" and "ce monde de satisfaits"(115); Laforgue even, in his 'Chroniques' published in the Revue Indépendante in the last months of his life,

indulges in sarcasms concerning "le coeur de Paris", the "coeur brillant" which had been decimated in the recent disastrous fire at the Opéra-Comique(116). The opening poem of Les Complaintes speaks ironically of "ce Paris, jardin / Obtus et chic" of "ces chers bourgeois", while the prose poem ('Prose Blanche') 'Grande Complainte de la ville de Paris' is a savage satire upon this Paris and the ethic which dominates its frenzied activity, summed up in the caustic: "Facilités de paiement, mais de l'argent. De l'argent, bonnes gens!"(117). It is above all in the Derniers Vers that Laforgue's revulsion against bourgeois values is strongest; the theme of the 'outsider' is linked throughout the work to a scorn for the 'genteel' world of middle-class existence. Laforgue is revolted by bourgeois hypocrisy concerning sex and marriage, and concerning religion - "ces messes dont on a fait un jeu"(118). Through a whole set of associated symbols, in fact, - dimanche, cloches, habits de dimanche, promenades, brioches, encens, and the symbol of the piano with its monotonous and "stériles ritournelles" - the cosy routine of middle-class existence is inseparably linked with religion, and both are judged to be meaningless, hollow, resting on a common hypocrisy(119).

Alongside this, there runs a veiled but insistent awareness in Laforgue's work of what the Derniers Vers call "toute la misère des grands centres"(120), and a certain sympathy for the 'other half' of Paris, its "banlieues adoptives"(*). Laforgue's letters contain several references to long walks "dans les tristes faubourgs", and amongst the

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(*) Cf. again the 'Grande Complainte de la ville de Paris': "Et à l'antipode, qu'y fait-on? Ça travaille, pour que Paris se ravitaille...".

fragments of novels or short-stories left behind at his death there are a number of passages of very realistic (even 'naturalistic') descriptions of working-class misery (his professed anti-naturalism applied only to poetry). Hamlet in his wanderings passes "des troupeaux de prolétaires [...] revenant des bagnes capitalistes, voûtés sous leur sordide destinée", stopping to reflect: "Parbleu! [...] je le sais aussi bien que vous, sinon mieux; l'ordre social existant est un scandale à suffoquer la Nature!"(121) - a condemnation made all the stronger by Laforgue's view of the 'scandal' of Nature!(*). But it is in the Derniers Vers that the awareness of the effects of industrialisation and of working-class misery is strongest, in particular in the first section ("Oh, dans les bruines, toutes mes cheminées!... / D'usines...") where a contrast is made between this and the comforts of bourgeois existence; although obviously far from being the principal theme of the Derniers Vers, it forms an integral part of the backdrop of autumn, human wretchedness, and approaching death. Yet in spite of this revulsion from bourgeois values, Laforgue fails to identify with any other social group or to take up,some other cause. Hamlet reflects that the workers are accustomed to their wretchedness: "Mais quoi! Ils sont nés là-dedans, c'est une vieille histoire, ça n'empêche pas leurs lunes de miel, ni leur peur de la mort [...]." He toys with the idea of violent insurrection to overthrow the existing social order, but not with

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(*) Although to be fair one should note also the following line: "Et, moi, je ne suis qu'un parasite féodal." As so often in Laforgue's Moralités légendaires, deliberate anachronism has the effect of an (at least partial) ironical 'cancelling-out'; though he sees the evil, Hamlet will not commit himself to any course of action to remedy it.

the aim of establishing a new, more just order - rather with the aim of returning to a chimerical life based purely on 'instinct': "Levez-vous un beau jour! mais pour qu'alors ça finisse! Mettez tout à feu et à sang! Ecrasez comme punaises d'insomnies les castes, les religions, les idées, les langues! Refaites-nous une enfance fraternelle sur la Terre, notre mère à tous, qu'on irait pâturer dans les pays chauds." Yet even this is useless: the workers would not listen, they would rather heed Polonius' injunction: "Enrichissez-vous!"(122). Repelled by the values of the bourgeois society in the midst of which he finds himself, Laforgue nevertheless fails to see any positive alternative; he remains caught in an impasse, remains the 'outsider'. The only 'solution' he envisages is a purely negative (and nihilistic) one: the total destruction of the existing social order. In the sixth, and central, section of the Derniers Vers, in which the theme of the 'pariah' is most prominent, the poet reviews in his mind images of the world around him, conducting an "enquête" into their worth - and concludes that nothing is of any value: "Il faut tout casser":

> J'entasse sur mon lit, les journaux, linge sale,
> Dessins de mode, photographies quelconques,
> Toute la capitale,
> Matrice sociale.
> Que nul n'intercède,
> Ce ne sera jamais assez,
> Il n'y a qu'un remède,
> C'est de tout casser.
> O fanfares dans les soirs!
> Ce sera barbare,
> Ce sera sans espoir. [...]
>
> Que nul n'intercède,
> Il faut tout casser.

Of course, Laforgue will not smash anything 'in reality'; he is too meek and gentle. The wish to destroy remains a

wish, and the poet trapped within his own impotence. Moreover, this will to destruction is not Laforgue's final word in the Derniers Vers: he attempts to accept existing realities. Yet the solution sought is on the level of personal rather than social values. Laforgue remains typical of a large number of young bourgeois intellectuals in the closing decades of the nineteenth century in revolt against the values of the society which spawned them, yet unable to see any clear alternative to that society. And his sense of alienation from the world around him, and the social impasse to which it led, is an important contributing factor in Laforgue's nihilism.

(vi) Conclusion.

It is difficult to speak of a 'final' philosophical position or attitude in the case of a man who died at the age of twenty-seven. The work completed shortly before his death points towards a partial resolution of the major intellectual conflicts of the years preceding, but inevitably a doubt remains. In his mature works, moreover, it is personal, rather than strictly philosophical, problems which exercise Laforgue's attention; nevertheless these personal concerns are placed firmly within a definite philosophical framework, one of which Laforgue is constantly aware.

There is something of a paradox in Laforgue. He is to a large extent a solitary and an autodidacte; yet at the same time he is one of the best representatives of the intellectual life of the age in which he lived. Laforgue relived, in a sense, the intellectual history of his age,

deliberately seeking out the most resolutely 'modern' ideas in every field of knowledge from biology and astronomy to aesthetics; indeed, he has even been called "the only nineteenth-century poet to be familiar with the advanced thought of his age"(123). The extremity of his reaction to many of these ideas is due in part to his utter absorption, initially at least, in a world made up wholly of abstractions; "Cerveau mort d'abstrait", he once noted of himself(124). This extremity apart, however, Laforgue stands as supremely representative of many young intellectuals of his age, through all the stages of his career: in the débâcle of all his metaphysical and moral beliefs; in the subsequent appeal of the philosophies of Schopenhauer and his part-disciple Hartmann; in the profound sense of moral paralysis into which his initial anguished nihilism developed (partly as a result of the latter philosophies); in his consequent belief in the corrosiveness of thought or reason; in his attempt - like Barrès after him - to find a refuge from both thought and solitude in an imagined 're-integration' in some new, non-rational unity; and in his profound sense of alienation from the values of the society in whose midst he lived.

Chapter VIII: REFERENCES.

(1) Letter to Gustave Kahn, March 1885. Lettres à un ami, Mercure de France, 1941, p. 79.

(2) Mélanges posthumes, Mercure de France, 1903, p. 7.

(3) ibid., p. 8.

(4) loc. cit.

(5) To Mme Mültzer, March 1882. Oeuvres complètes, Mercure de France, 1922-31, tome IV, p. 127.

(6) Mélanges posthumes [M.P.], p. 7.

(7) Persée et Andromède, in Moralités légendaires. O.C., III, p. 236.

(8) A number of specific references to the two men occur in Laforgue's letters and notes. A letter of August 1882 speaks of his meditation on the "struggle for life" (Cf. to Mme Mültzer, O.C., IV, p. 188).

(9) Cf. Pierre REBOUL, 'La Genèse du ciel laforguien', Annales universitatis Saraviensis - Philosophie, 1954, pp. 101-117.

(10) Cf. his article 'Le Précurseur de l'homme', Le Voltaire, 1-vi-1886.

(11) Cf. the poems 'Fantaisie' and 'L'Impossible'.

(12) Cf. inter alia 'Farce éphémère', 'Apothéose', 'Médiocrité', 'Méditation grisâtre', 'Intarissablement'.

(13) Cf. 'Curiosités déplacées' and 'Eclair de gouffre'.

(14) 'Crépuscule de dimanche d'été'.

(15) ibid.; cf. also 'Intarissablement', 'L'Impossible', and 'Soir de carnaval'.

(16) Cf. 'La Tête des morts', 'La Première nuit', 'L'Impossible', 'Eclair de gouffre', 'Curiosités déplacées'.

(17) 'Curiosités déplacées'.

(18) 'Soir de carnaval'.

(19) 'Farce éphémère'; cf. also 'Crépuscule de dimanche d'été', 'Soir de carnaval'.

(20) Cf. 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la terre' and 'Rosace en vitrail' in Le Sanglot de la Terre; 'Préludes autobiographiques' in Les Complaintes; and notes in M.P., esp. pp. 15 ff.

(21) December 1880. Lettres à un ami [L.A.], pp. 22-23.

(22) Cf. for the first 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la terre' in Le Sanglot de la Terre; for the second, M.P., pp. 12-13.

(23) Cf. 'L'Impossible' in Le Sanglot de la Terre.

(24) To Mme Mültzer, April 1882. O.C., IV, p. 135.

(25) Cf. inter alia L.A., pp. 49, 50, 59-60 (March 1884); O.C., IV, pp. 24, 82, 180; V, pp. 60-61, 96, 162-4.

(26) 'L'Art moderne en Allemagne', M.P., pp. 201, 198.

(27) Eduard von HARTMANN, La Philosophie de l'Inconscient. Introduction de D. Nolen, p. xlviii.

(28) Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Feb. 1892, pp. 50-51. Reprinted in Inédits de Jules Laforgue, Editions de la Connaissance, II, p.64.

(29) loc. cit.

(30) Les Complaintes, in O.C., I, p. 123.

(31) Salomé, in Moralités légendaires. O.C., III, pp. 152-155. Cf. also the passage 'L'Aquarium', O.C., III, Appendix, pp. 267-271.

(32) Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Feb. 1892, p. 49. Reprinted, with some errors, in Ed. de la Connaissance, II, p. 41.

(33) 'L'Art moderne en Allemagne', M.P., p. 203. The same idea is repeated many times over by Laforgue.

(34) M.P., p. 142. Laforgue is fond of repeating the phrase "l'Inconscient souffle où il veut". Cf. also M.P., pp. 154, 208.

(35) Cf. M.P., p. 196. Epigraph to 'L'Art moderne en Allemagne'.

(36) Note published in La Revue Blanche, 15 March 1896, p. 248. These words are followed by a quotation from Spencer's General Synthesis.

(37) 'L'Art moderne en Allemagne', M.P., pp. 198, 199.

(38) ibid., pp. 201, 202.

(39) ibid., pp. 201, 202, 204, 205.

(40) ibid., p. 199.

(41) ibid., p. 202.

(42) HARTMANN, La Philosophie de l'Inconscient, tr. D. Nolen, Paris 1877, tome II, p. 237. Author's italics.

(43) ibid., tome II, p. 195 f.

(44) ibid., tome I, p. 438.

(45) ibid., tome II, pp. 337-8.

(46) ibid., tome II, p. 349.

(47) In Moralités légendaires, O.C., III, pp. 161-2.

(48) Cf. M.P., p. 19.

(49) Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Feb. 1892, pp. 50-51. Repr. in Ed. de la Connaissance, II, pp. 64-65.

(50) To Mme Mültzer, 18 July 1882. O.C., IV, p. 181. Cf. also IV, pp. 24, 82, 196, 197.

(51) M.P., pp. 17-18. Cf. also ibid., pp. 16-17.

(51A) ibid., p. 18.

(52) loc. cit.

(53) Fragment published in Ed. de la Connaissance, II, p. 64. The concluding phrase is in substance reproduced in M.P., p. 17.

(54) M.P., p. 16.

(55) 'Complainte d'une convalescence en mai', in Les Complaintes. O.C., I, p. 193.

(56) To Henry, 22 April 1882. O.C., IV, pp. 144-5.

(57) 'Pierrots', II, in L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune. O.C., I, p. 224.

(58) 'Un mot au soleil pour commencer', in L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune [Imitation]. O.C., I, p.208.

(59) 'Pierrots', V, in Imitation. O.C., I, p. 228.

(60) Pierrot fumiste, in M.P., p. 99.

(61) 'Avis, je vous prie', in Imitation. O.C., I, p.274.

(62) To Henry, 5 May 1882. O.C., IV, p. 157.

(63) Des Fleurs de bonne volonté [F.B.V.], XL, 'Petites misères d'autumne'. O.C., II, p. 89.

(64) F.B.V., III, 'Mettons le doigt sur la plaie'. O.C., II, p. 12.

(65) F.B.V., XI, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 28. Cf. also F.B.V., LVI, 'Air de biniou'.

(66) F.B.V., XXV, 'Impossibilité de l'infini en hosties', O.C., II, p. 56.

(67) F.B.V., XL, 'Petites misères d'automne'. O.C., II, p.89.

(68) F.B.V., XVIII, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 41.

(69) Le Concile féerique. O.C., II, p. 129-131. Original lines in F.B.V., XXXI, 'Petites misères d'août'.

(69A) ibid. O.C., II, p. 137. Cf. also F.B.V., XLII, 'Esthétique'.

(70) ibid. O.C., II, p. 139.

(70A) F.B.V., XXII, 'Le Bon apôtre'.

(71) Derniers Vers [D.V.], V, 'Pétition'. O.C., II, p.160. The same lines are repeated in the 'Moralité légendaire' Lohengrin, fils de Parsifal, O.C., III, p.126.

(72A) Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, Feb. 1892, p. 52.

(72) Fragment published in Revue anarchiste, 1 Nov. 1893. Repr. in M.P., p. 47.

(73) Revue anarchiste, 1 Nov. 1893. Repr. in M.P., p. 52.

(74) Fragment published in Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, 1 Jan. 1891. Repr. in M.P., p. 65.

(75) Revue anarchiste, 1 Nov. 1893. Repr. in M.P., p. 52.

(75A) D.V., IV, 'Dimanches'.

(76) Revue anarchiste, 1 Nov. 1893. Repr. in M.P., p. 48.

(76A) D.V., V, 'Pétition'.

(77) Revue anarchiste, 1 Nov. 1893. Repr. in M.P., pp. 51-52, 48.

(77A) F.B.V., XXXV, 'L'Aurore-promise'.

(78) F.B.V., I, 'Avertissement'. O.C., II, pp.7-8.

(79) F.B.V., XVIII, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 42.

(80) M.P., p. 141.

(81) F.B.V., XXVI, 'Ballade'. O.C., II, p. 57.

(82) D.V., III, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 151.

(83) First published in La Vogue, Nov.-Dec. 1886. The fragment 'A propos de Hamlet' was published in Le Symboliste, 22 Oct. 1886.

(84) Hamlet, ou les suites de la piété filiale, in Moralités légendaires. O.C., III, p. 13.

(85) ibid., p. 45. Cf. also p. 40.

(86) ibid. p. 38.

(87) ibid., pp. 45-46.

(88) Marie-Jeanne DURRY, Jules Laforgue, Seghers ("Poètes d'aujourd'hui"), p. 127.

(89) Hamlet. O.C., III, p. 58.

(90) ibid., p. 67.

(91) Martin TURNELL, 'The Poetry of Jules Laforgue', Scrutiny, vol. V (1939-40), p. 149.

(92) D.V., VI, 'Simple agonie'. O.C., II, pp. 165-66. The last line is also spoken by Hamlet in 'A propos de Hamlet' (O.C., III, Appendix, p. 265).

(93) D.V., XII. O.C., II, p. 191.

(94) Cf. to Kahn, Feb. 1886, L.A., pp. 158-9; to Kahn, Summer 1886; to Emile Laforgue, July 1886, O.C., V, pp. 148-9; to Kahn, 1 Sept. 1886; to Marie Laforgue, 9 Sept. 1886, O.C., V, pp. 150-9.

(95) Le Temps, 6 August 1885.

(96) To Marie Laforgue, May 1883. O.C., V, p. 20.

(96A) 'Clair de lune', in Imitation.

(97) Fragments published in La Revue Blanche, under the heading 'Notes d'esthétique', 1 Dec. 1896, pp. 484, 485, 486 (and followed by Jarry's Les Paralipomènes d'Ubu!). Repr. in M.P., pp. 154, 157.

(98) Revue Blanche, 1 Dec. 1896, pp. 488. Repr. in M.P., with minor errors, pp. 162-3.

(99) Revue Blanche, 1 Dec. 1896, pp. 488, 486. M.P., pp.163, 158.

(100) To Mme Müllzer, March 1882. O.C., IV, p. 126.

(101) Revue Blanche, 1 Dec. 1896, p. 484. M.P., p. 152.

(102) To Henry, 12 July 1882. O.C., IV, p.178.

(103) To Henry, 12 August 1882. O.C., IV, p. 186.

(104) To Kahn, L.A., pp. 136-7.

(105) In Le Sanglot de la Terre. O.C., I, p. 44.

(106) To Ephrussi, 24 Dec. 1881. O.C., IV, pp. 70-71.

(107) M.P., p. 9. Cf. also letter to Henry, 12 Dec. 1881, O.C., IV, pp. 57-58; to Mme Mültzer, March 1882, O.C., IV, p. 127.

(108) 'Noël sceptique', in Le Sanglot de la terre. O.C., I, p. 44.

(109) 'Complainte d'une convalescence en mai', in Les Complaintes. O.C., I, p. 192.

(110) 'Complainte de Lord Pierrot', in Les Complaintes. O.C., I, p. 134.

(111) 'Pierrots', IV, in Imitation. O.C., I, p. 226.

(112) Hamlet, in O.C., III, pp. 24, 25.

(113) D.V., IV, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 156.

(114) 'Le Public des dimanches au salon', La Vie Moderne, 4 June 1881. Repr. in Ed. de la Connaissance, I, p.21.

(115) Cf. the fragment 'L'Aquarium', and Laforgue's monthly 'Chroniques' in the Revue Indépendante, Jan.-July 1887.

(116) Revue Indépendante. Repr. in Ed. de la Connaissance, I, p. 118.

(117) Les Complaintes, O.C., I, p. 180.

(118) D.V., IV, 'Dimanches'. O.C., II, p. 158.

(119) Cf. in particular sections III and IV (both entitled 'Dimanches') of D.V. For the symbol of the piano, cf. also F.B.V., XII, and the 'Complainte du piano qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés', in Les Complaintes.

(120) D.V., I, 'L'Hiver qui vient'. O.C., II, p. 146.

(121) Hamlet, in O.C., III, p. 37.

(122) ibid., p. 38.

(123) R. R. BOLGAR, 'The Present State of Laforgue Studies', French Studies, vol. IV, July 1950, No. 3, p. 199.

(124) Cited by François RUCHON, Jules Laforgue, 1860-1887. Sa vie - son oeuvre, Geneva, 1924, p. 242.

Chapter IX: MAURICE BARRÈS.

(i) Introduction and early development of Barrès.

Maurice Barrès is one of the finest representatives of the intellectual conflicts of his age. Hailed by admirers amongst the youth of his time as "le prince de la jeunesse", Barrès had from a very early age assumed the mantle of self-conscious representative of his generation, a stance which shortly after his arrival in Paris in 1883 had acquired the fixity almost of a pose. Not only had Barrès been submitted in the course of his education, and submitted himself, to the major philosophical and literary influences of his time, but from the moment of his Paris début he had struggled to establish contact with many of the leading intellectual and literary circles of the capital, continuing to remain abreast of developments in these milieux for many years to come. A study of Barrès' intellectual development throws considerable light, therefore, on that of the whole generation which he claimed to represent.

A preliminary remark concerns the nature of his early intellectual expectations. Like Laforgue, the young Barrès lives to a considerable extent in a world of abstract metaphysical and moral problems; like Laforgue, he is an example of what has been called a 'metaphysical mentality'. Looking back, Barrès saw himself in his youth as having been drunk with abstractions, as living in an "univers [...] désossé"(1). Yet this is true equally of him throughout the whole of his life. "Je n'ai jamais aimé que les métaphysiciens et les poètes", he is reported to have said(2). Moreover, Barrès

is dogged all life long by the need to find some philosophical basis upon which to found his actions; his reference to "le malaise qu'éprouvent certaines personnes pour agir, tant qu'elles n'ont pas fondé leur activité sur un principe spirituel"(3) applies first and foremost to himself.

Barrès' view, as a young man, of his own age was of a time of profound intellectual and moral crisis. There are many who, like him, "constatent douloureusement à vingt ans la contradiction et le sans racines de toutes les notions dont on les a chargés"(4). References to his own and to his contemporaries' 'nihilism' abound: "nous ne sommes que des nihilistes"(5); "notre cher nihilisme"(6); "le nihilisme moral de la générations que nous sommes"(7). His own age is seen as necessarily an age of transition: an intellectual and moral <u>impasse</u> a way out of which must be found. To the historian Thévenin, of the Collège de France, who confided to Barrès: "La grande affaire pour ma génération a été le passage de l'absolu au relatif", Barrès replied: "Et moi je dis: la grande affaire pour notre génération, ce serait de passer de la certitude à la négation sans perdre sa valeur morale."(8).(*) His whole intellectual struggle is summed up in the titles of his first two projected (but unpublished) works: <u>Le nihilisme contemporain</u>, and <u>Le Départ pour la vie</u>(**).

(*) Barrès was fond of repeating phrases and propositions which particularly appealed to him. This occurs again in the famous first chapter of <u>Les Déracinés</u> in the form: "La grande affaire pour les générations précédentes fut le passage de l'absolu au relatif; il s'agit aujourd'hui de passer de la certitude à la négation sans y perdre toute valeur morale." (Charpentier ed., 1897, pp. 14-15).

(**) The former was to have been a collection of essays, the latter a volume of 'nouvelles'.

Barrès was born at Charmes-sur-Moselle, in Lorraine, on 19 August 1862. Eight years later he witnessed the occupation of Charmes by the Germans, a memory which he later claimed never left him. His boyhood as a boarder at school seems to have been profoundly miserable and lonely, and by way of reaction he took refuge in reading in secret(9). This sense of isolation continued to plague him at the lycée de Nancy (1877-80), and was to continue also during Barrès' student days in Paris; an echo of it could be found, he claimed, in his first novels: "Tous mes premiers livres sont nourris des émotions intenses de mon internat. Sous l'oeil des Barbares en est un écho."(10) The same feelings also crystallised into a desire for revenge and for self-affirmation: "Ils verront bien, un jour"(11).(*) But the Barrès of these years was also an extremely sensitive, susceptible and intelligent young man, full of literary enthusiasms and eager to absorb and to make his own all the literary and philosophical influences of the day; as he writes of the hero of his first novel: "A dix-huit ans, il était gorgé des plus audacieuses paradoxes de la pensée humaine" and "il s'en faisait de la substance sentimentale"(12).

The first major philosophical impact on the young Barrès was the teaching of his 'professeur de philosophie', Auguste Burdeau, at the lycée de Nancy from October 1879 to January 1880. The account given of this in the famous first chapter of Les Déracinés (1897) is highly suspect; nevertheless it is worth trying to unravel fact from later fiction.

(*) Barrès' literary ambitions, he himself later maintained, were born initially of a desire for recognition: "Au début [...] je rêvai de la notoriété. Mes raisons d'écrire me venaient du dehors, je désirais le succès." (Cited by Henri MONDOR, Maurice Barrès avant le Quartier latin, Paris, 1956, p. 159).

The criticisms of the French educational system advanced by Barrès here are not new(*), but the ideological framework into which events in the novel have to be fitted, and Barrès' polemical aims, lead him to simplify and to distort to no small extent. Burdeau - become in the novel Paul Bouteiller - must be portrayed as an agent of the Third Republic, regimenting his "jeunes recrues" following his "consigne reçue de l'Etat"; he is the Tainean 'Jacobin' with his "esprit de conquête"(13); the educational system is "un puissant instrument d'Etat pour former les cerveaux", and Bouteiller is "un instrument de transmission". He is thus not only a "philosophe kantien" but also "gambettiste"(14). Moreover, the official Kantian ethics (or 'civic morality') taught by Bouteiller and the State must be somehow linked to the nefarious influence of German metaphysics as an object of attack. Hence Kant, Schopenhauer and the rest are lumped together as sources of an identical nihilism. And thus Bouteiller, and through him the State, is responsible for 'uprooting' youth, for deforming "des âmes lorraines" and for turning them away from "[les] intérêts de la vie française"(15).

(*) Cf. as early as Jan. 1885 in Les Taches d'encre (no. 3, p. 48), where Barrès attacks "ce jacobinisme qui sacrifie partout l'individu à la masse. Le lycée abêtit déjà les trois quarts des intelligences, des caractères surtout." A few years later he writes: "Nos écoles, cette instruction de qui nous attendons tout, ne tuent-elles pas la race? [...] Il s'agit de discipliner l'homme, de mater son animalité, et quand on y est arrivé, on a tout détruit." (Le Voltaire, 31-xii-1889). And in similar vein, in Toute licence sauf contre l'amour (1892), Barrès hits out at "cette manie moderne de donner une façon commune à tous les esprits et de briser l'individu" (Orig. ed., 1892, p. 26). In conformity with this principle, he is here violently opposed to 'patriotic' student organisations which attempt to 'regiment' youth.

Bouteiller dazzles his pupils by his eloquence and by the augustness of his person, aided by the closed atmosphere of the lycée, "favorable, comme tout groupement, aux épidémies morales". He takes them on a rapid survey of metaphysical systems from the Greeks to the present day, which leaves them "éperdus devant la multiplicité, la splendeur et la contradiction des systèmes". But it is above all to the German metaphysicians that Bouteiller introduces his flock, and in particular to Kant: "Kantien déterminé, il leur donna la vérité d'après son maître". This Kantianism, however, - but is this Burdeau's teaching or Barrès' understanding of Kant? - is Kant strengthened by Schopenhauer, an extreme metaphysical scepticism:

> Le monde n'est qu'une cire à laquelle notre esprit comme un cachet impose son empreinte... Notre esprit perçoit le monde sous les catégories d'espace, de temps, de causalité... Notre esprit dit: "Il y a de l'espace, du temps, des causes"; c'est le cachet qui se décrit lui-même. Nous ne pouvons pas vérifier si ces catégories correspondent à rien de réel. (16)

Anlogside this (and this is Barrès' real object of attack), Bouteiller's teaching embraces above all Kant's ethical philosophy; from this position of "scepticisme absolu", Kant "rétablit le principe de certitude, disant: "Une réalité existe, c'est la moi morale".". And Bouteiller goes on to exalt the categorical imperative and the values of honour, responsibility, duty and patriotism. In vain: "Ils ne le suivirent pas." The final result of this teaching is a nihilism more reminiscent of Schopenhauer than of Kant:

> Soudain un homme d'une grande éloquence communiquait à ces jeunes garçons le plus aigu sentiment du néant. [...] Ces lointains parfums orientaux de la mort, filtrés par le réseau des penseurs allemands, ne vont-ils pas troubler ces novices? La dose trop forte pourrait jeter chacun d'eux dans une affirmation désespérée de soi-même; ils se composeraient une sorte de nihilisme cruel. (17)

The anti-intellectualist moral Barrès wishes us to draw is obvious: all philosophical systems are mutually contradictory, and all philosophy - particularly that concerned with universal values and moral laws - is both false and morally dangerous. The reality of Barrès' own year of philosophy was, inevitably, less simple than this romanticized version. To the greater intimacy of his Cahiers he could admit that: "Bouteiller n'est pas une cause de déracinement. C'est la doctrine du déracinement qui devient cause à son tour."(18) Moreover, whilst Burdeau was certainly a convinced Kantian, his philosophical teaching drew upon other sources also: the empiricism of Mill and Spencer, the neo-criticism of Renouvier (this is doubtless the "scepticisme absolu" of Bouteiller's teaching), and even elements of the spiritualism of the eclectics, amongst other influences(*). He seems also to have introduced his pupils to Schopenhauer and Hartmann: "Burdeau de sa captivité allemande [...] nous rapporta Schopenhauer et Hartmann", Barrès later wrote(19).(**)

(*) Translations by Burdeau of Kant's Critique de la raison pratique and Critique du jugement were both announced by Germer Baillière as being "sous presse" in 1879. Burdeau also translated Spencer's Essais de science, de morale et d'esthétique. His translations of Schopenhauer were noted in a previous chapter.

(**) There is a mysterious reference to this by the later Barrès: "J'ai sur les lèvres une petite amertume. Est-ce le livre de Schopenhauer que ce pauvre Burdeau m'a donné quand j'étais à dix-sept ans son élève?" (Cited by François DUHOURCAU, La Voix intérieure de Maurice Barrès, Paris, 1929, p. 51. According to Henri GOUHIER, Notre ami Maurice Barrès, the quotation comes from an article in La Cocarde of 1 Feb. 1895). The reference to this book poses a problem, if we are to give any credence to Barrès' statement. A translation by Burdeau of Schopenhauer's Le Fondement de la morale appeared in 1879. But this is a dense and technical work, although written in a vigorous style. Moreover, in it Schopenhauer attempts to destroy all previous ethical systems, including that of Kant, presenting all human values - justice, honour, conscience - as merely illusions masking a fundamental

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More generally, Burdeau seems to have been an adherent of that rationalist and anti-clerical bourgeois spiritualism which, rejuvenated by the neo-Kantianism of Renouvier, was at the basis of the secularised, republican ethics which the educational reformers of the Third Republic were concerned to promote throughout the whole of the educational establishment of France(*). Its end result was such manuals as Paul Bert's L'Instruction civique à l'école; Burdeau himself wrote a number of Manuels d'instruction civique for primary schools. To this extent, Barrès was perfectly justified (from his point of view) in attacking Bouteiller's 'Kantianism'; he was in fact attacking the whole attempt of the 'rationalist' Third Republic to remould the educational system of France and the minds of the country's young.

Nevertheless, the effect of this teaching on the young Barrès was great, and it seems to have been overwhelmingly

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(*) Barrès, in Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme (1902), quotes, in support of his contentions concerning the Kantian basis of current teaching, André CRESSON, La Morale de Kant: "La morale de Kant, plus ou moins modifiée, est la base de presque tous les cours de philosophie morale professés, en France particulièrement. On la retrouve dans la plupart des manuels destinés à l'éducation des enfants. Par là elle prend comme un caractère officiel." (1902 ed., p. 56). Cf. also the quotation from Louis Weber, Secretary of the Société française de philosophie, supra, p. 107 Note.

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/ egoism. Although one can certainly imagine his reasons for translating the work (Schopenhauer's popularity in France was rapidly growing, and Burdeau may well have been simply riding the wave), it seems hard to imagine Burdeau presenting such a technical work, and one which undermines his own Kantian ethics, to his pupil Barrès for scrutiny. Could the work in question therefore have been J. Bourdeau's anthology of 1880 (although this too contains the same attacks on the categorical imperative, whilst the date of publication would seem to argue against it - Burdeau having left Nancy at the end of January 1880)? It seems impossible to choose between these two works.

destructive of existing beliefs without replacing them with new ones. Numerous references to Burdeau occur in Barrès' articles of the 1880's and 1890's, and the Cahiers are full of such references(*). Burdeau was a born orator, with a marvellous gift of eloquence, and the fascination exercised over the young Sturel of Les Déracinés by Bouteiller was certainly also that exercised by Burdeau over Barrès. "Burdeau savait et voulait nous émouvoir par le pathétique de la voix et du geste", he later wrote(20). "Cet homme remarquable [...] il a violemment ému l'enfant de dix-sept ans que j'étais"(21). Barrès claims to have had "un vague sentiment du cabotinage de Burdeau"; nevertheless the description of Les Déracinés - "On peut se croire à dix-sept ans révolté contre ses maîtres; on n'échappe pas à la vision qu'ils nous proposent des hommes et des circonstances."(22) - almost certainly contains a strong autobiographical reference. Equally autobiographical is the passage: "Il [Bouteiller] croyait bien avec Kant et par l'appel au coeur, reconstituer à ses élèves la catégorie de la moralité et un ensemble de certitudes. Ils ne le suivirent pas."(23).(**) The effect

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(*) Over thirty years later, Barrès could still remember clearly Burdeau's exposition of the Heraclitan philosophy of Becoming: "Je me rappelle mes longs après-midi d'écolier, quand Burdeau donnait la parole au vieil Héraclite. Le monde, disait-il, est un fleuve où toujours le flot succède au flot, et l'on ne descend pas deux fois dans le même fleuve.[...] Rien n'est, tout devient." (Preface to La Grande Pitié des Eglises de France, Paris, Emile-Paul, 1914, pp. i-ii).

(**) Barrès writes in his Cahiers (I, p. 94): "M. Burdeau faisait reposer tout son enseignement sur le principe kantien. Il le formulait ainsi: agir toujours de telle manière que notre action puisse servir de règle à tout homme placé dans la même situation que nous." Maurice DAVANTURE, in an article on 'Barrès, Burdeau et Bouteiller' (Maurice Barrès. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nancy, 1963. Annales de l'Est, No.24, p. 39), cites Burdeau in his preface to Spencer's Essais de morale defending the 'moral conscience' of man against the charge of historical relativity: "L'idéal échappe à la loi du changement [...] seule la loi morale est adorable."

of this teaching seems to have been to produce in the young Barrès a genuine sense of disorientation and of the absence of any firm philosophical principle which would provide an 'anchorage' in life (it is significant that the images in which Barrès speaks of its impact are always 'torrents' and 'waves' which sweep him away(24)). While it was certainly not the only one, the teaching of Burdeau was to be one of the sources of the "affirmation désespérée de soi-même" and "nihilisme cruel" of which Barrès speaks in Les Déracinés, and which were to mark his own intellectual life as a young man in Paris. In this respect, the fact that Burdeau's teaching was largely representative of the secular ethical teaching of the schools of the Third Republic is itself significant: for Barrès also is here typical of many young men of his generation in the failure of these purely secular, 'abstract' ethical values to gain a hold over his mind, in his passage through a long ethical impasse, and in his attempt, ultimately, to find new values which will be in opposition to those of the secular, rationalist Republic(*).

(*) That such an effect should have been produced on a young man as intelligent as Barrès seems at first sight strange. Yet Barrès seems, for all his gifts of irony, to have been victim of a certain youthful naïvety. All the same, he was not alone in reacting thus. Léon Daudet was in the philosophy class of Burdeau at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and although his comments on Burdeau must be read bearing in mind his extreme malice and political bias at the time of writing, they nonetheless provide an interesting comparison. Amongst the philosophies outlined by Burdeau, Daudet lists those of Spencer, Bain, Mill, Schopenhauer, Fouillée, Ribot, Spinoza, Leibniz, Guyau, and of course, and above all, Kant. Ardently anti-clerical, according to Daudet "le criticisme destructeur de Kant lui était cher surtout comme porte de l'incrédulité". Moreover, Daudet claims that a similar destructive effect was experienced by himself and his fellow-pupils: "Le résultat de ce gavage évolutionniste et criticiste [...] ce fut l'anarchie pure et simple. L'Inconscient de Hartmann et les ouvrages de Schopenhauer, avidement lus et commentés, s'ajoutaient à Kant pour combattre en nous le bon sens / Cont.

A further significant element in the very early intellectual development of Barrès was his concentrated reading, with his friend Stanislas de Guaita, of the poets and novelists of the French nineteenth century. It seems that the effect of Burdeau's philosophy class cannot have been so devastating as to rob him of all capacity for enthusiasm; looking back, Barrès sees this period as "le plus beau de ma vie", and "le temps d'où je date ma naissance"(25). Yet paradoxically, for all his youthful enthusiasm the effect on the young Barrès of this reading seems to have been merely to strengthen the work of destruction begùn in the philosophy class. Its themes Barrès sums up as: "L'indifférence de la nature aux joies et aux souffrances de l'humanité, notre incapacité de diriger notre destin, la vanité des succès et des échecs devant la fosse terminale..."(26) - themes commonplace in the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, and behind which lie the familiar materialistic and deterministic doctrines of the age. These themes, however - and in particular the meditation upon death which renders futile all action -, are to haunt Barrès for the rest of this life. No later influence or experience, he

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Cont. from previous page:
/ national [sic] et les traditions de méthode et de mesure héritées de nos pères. Notre crise d'encéphalite - comme dit Renan - nous détachait de toute croyance, et les comédies patriotiques de Burdeau ne compensaient pas ces démolitions." Daudet adds that one of his school-mates, "garçon de bonne famille, sans aucune tare, fort intelligent, me déclara un soir qu'il avait l'intention de se tuer "parce que le monde était mauvais en soi"."(Fantômes et vivants, pp. 115-122). It is perhaps of passing interest to note that Burdeau was also 'professeur de philosophie' of the young Claudel and Romain Rolland at Louis-le-Grand, as also of Téodor de Wyzewa and Edouard Dujardin (Cf. DUJARDIN, Mallarmé par un des siens, Messein, 1936, pp. 35-36).

claimed, "n'a pénétré aussi profondément mon être" as "ce lyrisme vague, cette métaphysique abstraite auxquels je sacrifiai une partie de mon être en puissance". Its consequence was the creation in him of a "vague mortel et décidément insoutenable de la contemplation nihiliste"(27).

A final point which must be mentioned is Barrès' loss of his childhood religious faith. His childhood was certainly pious, but it is impossible to say exactly when this faith was lost. Perhaps the whole intellectual climate of the time (which Romain Rolland at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1886 was to call "déicide") contributed to destroy it. Barrès himself suggested in later life: "Les maîtres à qui nous devons les enivrements de notre vingtième année nous ont tous aiguillés sur l'antichristianisme"(28).

(ii) <u>The Influence of Renan and Taine</u>.

These, however, are influences exerted upon Barrès while he is still little more than an adolescent. Other influences were to be both more profound and more enduring, and above all the influence of Taine and of Renan. The two figures of Renan and Taine dominate the intellectual life of France in the years from 1870 to their deaths. In the fields of history, politics, science, religion, and the study of man himself, they had made a major impact on contemporary thought. To Victor Giraud they appeared as the Rousseau and Voltaire of their age, exercising over the last decades of the nineteenth century a kind of 'spiritual dictatorship'(29). Zola, France, Lemaître, Bourget, Brunetière are amongst the most noteworthy disciples of either or both of the

two philosophers(*); whilst the whole of Barrès' generation grows up in the shadow of the two men, whose influence is inescapable. This is all the more so in the case of Barrès: his avidity to plunge into the intellectual life of his age has already been noted; no less great is his life-long need for an intellectual and spiritual leader and teacher whom he can admire and follow (the famous prayer from Sous l'oeil des Barbares for a 'Maître' is far from expressing an isolated wish). The intellectual history of Barrès in his reaction to Taine and Renan is the intellectual history of a whole generation.

Barrès' familiarity with the work of the two men dates from the age of 15; by 1883, at the age of 21, he is familiar with the whole of their then published work(30). Time and again throughout the 1880's and early 1890's, the names of Taine and Renan recur in the literary and journalistic writings of Barrès; whilst later the Cahiers, with their innumerable references, provide the clearest evidence of the continuing influence exerted over his mind by the two men. What Barrès takes from the thought of each will vary as he grows older, and in his maturity it is the influence of Taine which is dominant. But as a young man it is above

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(*) Cf. Brunetière in 1882, on the influence of Renan: "Les hommes tels que M. Renan, dans la situation qu'il occupe, avec l'influence qu'il exerce [...] ont un peu charge d'âmes. Ils ne vivent plus, ni ne pensent, ni ne parlent pour eux seulement, mais pour tous ceux qui les écoutent, et qui les lisent, et dont ils sont les guides." ('Sur deux discours académiques de Renan', Pages sur Ernest Renan, Perrin, 1924, p. 57. Orig. publ. in the Revue des Deux Mondes, 15-vi-1882).

According to Victor GIRAUD, Taine et Renan. Pages perdues [Essays of Barrès], Paris, 1922, Introd., p. 7, Brunetière later claimed that "les hommes de sa génération n'ont progressivement conquis leur originalité que dans la mesure où ils s'affranchissaient de l'influence de Renan et de Taine". Giraud lists along with Brunetière as examples of this: Faguet, de Vogüé, Bourget, Lemaître, France, and even Loti [sic].

all Renan who dominates his thinking.

The works of Renan, he later maintained, had been "un des appuis de [sa] jeunesse"(31). "M. Renan était à nos yeux un des plus glorieux drapeaux de l'intelligence française."(32). Elsewhere he refers back to "cette sorte d'ivresse que me donnait alors la pensée renanienne"(33); and in the year of his death, referring to his brochure Huit jours chez M. Renan, he stated:

> Je n'ai pas passé huit jours avec M. Renan [...] mais j'ai bu largement, sur la place publique, à sa coupe enchanteresse, et voici près d'un demi-siècle que je vis familièrement avec ses meilleures imaginations. (34)

Such was his veneration for the master that in 1885 Barrès made a trip to Britanny with his friend Charles Le Goffic which included a 'pilgrimage' to Renan's house(35); he also, knew, through Le Goffic, Renan's son Ary from whom he gleaned many personal details concerning Renan (many of which were to find their way into Huit jours chez M. Renan). Le Goffic later described Barrès at this time as "jeune Lorrain dilettante, misanthrope et incroyant" and as "imbu de nihilisme renanien"(36). (Others, less flattering, referred to the delicate and nervous young Barrès as "Mademoiselle Renan"(37).) Moreover, Renan appears in person in several of Barrès' early works: he is the subject of Huit jours chez M. Renan; the 'vieillard' of chapter 4 of Sous l'oeil des Barbares, "le vénérable M. X...", is none other than he (Barrès was fond of referring to Renan as "l'illustre vieillard"(38); and he appears again, this time by name, in the opening chapter of Le Jardin de Bérénice.

As early as 1883, Barrès saw Renan as the dominant influence in contemporary thought(39). Yet his attitude to

his master is ambiguous almost from the first, a curious mixture of admiration and resentment. Huit jours is a pastiche and satire of Renan, irreverent and even impertinent; and for all that Barrès later protested that he had no intention of offending Renan, it is not surprising that the latter did take offence(*). Moreover, this work is merely the culmination of a long line of references to and articles on Renan, always in the same insinuating, ironical or would-be ironical, and resentful tones. In Sous l'oeil des Barbares the 'illustre vieillard' is given a symbolic beating by his strangely irritated young disciple, the hero of the novel. Whilst in the first issue of Les Taches d'encre (Barrès' own review published at the age of 22!), alongside expressions of his admiration for Renan, Barrès had referred to him as a "génie jésuitique" (a feature also of his portrayal in Huit jours), had suggested a comparison with Tartuffe, spoken in connection with Renan of "cette souriante hypocrisie des sceptiques", and, most significant of all, had written the lines:

> Renan aime à faire accepter des âmes simples les plus parfaites immoralités: il les trouble et il les charme. C'est un parfait rhéteur, et celui qui aura fait le plus pour le nihilisme moral de la génération que nous sommes. Les paradoxes de Gautier étonnaient jadis: que sont-ils auprès de ceux-ci! (40)

(*) Barrès' protestations of his absence of satirical intentions in the 'Avertissement' to the second (1890) edition of the work are doubtless to be taken with a grain of salt; but he also wrote, less tongue-in-cheek this time, in Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort (1894): "j'ai eu l'occasion de constater qu'on peut froisser ceux-là mêmes qu'on goûte le plus" (Ed. déf., Plon, 1921, p. 195). However, the circumstances of the publication of these pages in volume form (which first brought fame, or notoriety, to the young Barrès) appear to give the lie to these claims of innocence. Extracts appeared in Le Voltaire in 1886, and the whole in the Revue de Paris et de Saint-Pétersbourg at the beginning of 1888. Renan's son Ary thereupon defied Barrès to ever republish the work; Barrès took this as a challenge and the work appeared in volume form a few weeks later. (Cf. P.-H. PETITBON, Taine, Renan, Barrès. Etude d'influence, Paris, 1935, p. 25).

The sources of such a judgement of Renan must be sought in the philosophy of the latter during the last fifteen or twenty years of his life. The chief features of this philosophy - Renan's growing metaphysical scepticism, his political and social pessimism verging on an attitude of defeatism, his growing belief that the development of contemporary thought has led to a complete ethical impasse (in which he himself has nothing to offer save an ethical relativism bordering on nihilism, a sensualistic hedonism, and an attitude of 'intellectual dilettantism'), and finally the idea that reason and the advance of scientific knowledge are inevitably destructive of all metaphysical, religious and ethical ideals -, have already been discussed in an earlier chapter(*). All of these features are noticed by Barrès, all help to create the composite portrait which he paints of Renan at this time, and all have a deep impact upon him.

First and foremost, Renan is seen as expressing a metaphysical and moral nihilism which in turn undermines all existing values and beliefs in others. In a 'conte' published in 1885 and destined to become part of the first chapter of Sous l'oeil des Barbares, the figure of Renan ('le maître') is made to speak of "la désolation étendue sur ce vaste charnier de l'univers" and to attest "la poussière des traditions avec la détresse [redacted] d'être"(41). Whilst in Sous l'oeil des Barbares, the 'illustre vieillard', M. X..., preaches a hedonistic sensualism, approves of his young disciple's already nihilistic view of the world ("un monde d'où est absente l'idée du devoir (l'effort, le dévouement), sinon comme volupté raffinée"), claims to

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(*) Cf. chapter III, supra.

regard life as merely a farce and to consider the belief "qu'il est au monde quelque chose d'important" as good only for fools(42). Sometimes Barrès seems to consider Renan to have been unwittingly a nihilist; in an article written on the death of the latter in 1892, he claims that Renan died without fully realising the metaphysical and moral 'cul-de-sac' into which he had led contemporary thought(43). But most often his charge is of nihilistic intent; Renan's philosophical casuistry, as Barrès sees it, is designed to undermine beliefs and values. Thus in Sous l'oeil des Barbares, M. X... is called a "sophiste rêveur" and "causeur divin, maître qui insinua des doubles à toutes les certitudes"(44). Here one must spring to a partial defence of Renan and stress the importance for him of what he calls "l'esprit de dialogue". Frequently in his later writings he expresses the view that truth is to be found not in direct or dogmatic statement, but in a careful balancing of different or opposing 'truths'; indeed, this 'esprit de dialogue' (which Barrès at times deplores as his 'indecision') is almost for Renan an epistemological principle(*). Barrès

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(*) Cf. the préface to Dialogues et fragments philosophiques (1876), where Renan praises the dialogue form "parce qu'elle n'a rien de dogmatique et qu'elle permet de présenter successivement les diverses faces d'un problème, sans que l'on soit obligé de conclure" (Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, tome I, p. 551). Similarly, in the preface to his Drames philosophiques (1888), Renan states that: "La forme du dialogue est, en l'état actuel de l'esprit humain, la seule qui, selon moi, puisse convenir à l'exposition des idées philosophiques. Les vérités de cet ordre ne doivent être ni directement niées, ni directement affirmées; elles ne sauraient être l'objet de démonstrations. Ce qu'on peut, c'est de les présenter par leurs faces diverses, d'en montrer le fort, le faible, la nécessité, les équivalences. Tous les hauts problèmes de l'humanité sont dans ce cas." (O.C., III, p. 371). And the 'Avant-propos' to Le Prêtre de Némi also takes up the idea: "Un ouvrage bien complet ne doit pas avoir besoin qu'on le réfute. L'envers de chaque pensée doit y être indiqué, de manière que le lecteur saisisse d'un seul coup d'oeil les deux faces opposées dont se compose toute vérité." (O.C., III, p. 526)

certainly fails to grasp the significance of this feature of Renan's thought, as also at times of other features (strangely enough, for all his own gifts of irony, Barrès in his pastiche of Renan in Huit jours appears frequently to overlook the irony of certain of the latter's statements which he parodies). But there can be no doubt also that Renan in his later work goes beyond this principle, and that his intellectual dilettantism does represent, as Barrès insinuates time and time again, a playing about with religious, philosophical and ethical beliefs, born of a conviction of the non-validity of all such beliefs. A final significant feature of this intellectual dilettantism is Renan's tendency, as seen by Barrès, to look at the world 'du point de vue de Sirius'(45) - one of the elements of the portrayal of Renan in Huit jours and the source of his 'metaphysical irony', of which Barrès writes sardonically:

> L'ironie métaphysique est une excellente attitude, en face d'un univers qui manque décidément d'imprévu. [It is] la clairvoyance d'un haut esprit, résigné à l'irrémédiable bassesse du plus grand nombre des minutes que vivent les hommes et qu'il vit lui-même.(46)

Rightly or wrongly, then, Barrès sees the philosophy of Renan in these years as an urbane but radical nihilism - a view shared (as we have seen) by many of his young contemporaries(*). Alongside this, he also sees Renan as the spokesman for an attitude of defeatism and of calculated withdrawal from the affairs of the world and from responsibility. In Huit jours he has Renan say, in words which characterize his portrayal throughout the work:

> J'ai toujours rêvé de m'enfermer dans une oeuvre idéale [...] j'ai bien vite reconnu [...] l'ignominie du siècle, la tristesse de tous les désirs. Je m'en suis tenu aux choses de l'âme, je suis un prêtre... (47).

(*) Cf. chapter III, supra.

Similarly, M. X... in Sous l'oeil des Barbares exhorts his young disciple to "vivre en dedans"(48); whilst in the opening chapter of Le Jardin de Bérénice Barrès has Renan justify his refusal of action by the reasoning: "Mon hygiène s'oppose à ce que je désire voir modifier avant que je meure la forme de nos institutions."(49).(*) Such an attitude may be all very well, implies Barrès, for an old man basking in the glow of success and fame, merely waiting for death to carry him away; but for a young man such as himself, in search of some guiding ideal, its inadequacy is patent(50).

Yet for all his implied criticisms, Barrès had turned to Renan as a master who would indicate certain goals or guiding ideals to him; and the apparent absence of any such indications in Renan's philosophy leaves Barrès in a state of moral paralysis. It is in vain that the young hero of Sous l'oeil des Barbares delivers his 'bastonnade' to his venerable master as a gesture of protest; he has still been marked by the latter's teaching, he is still overcome by a sense of the futility of all activity: "une grande fatigue l'affaissait au départ, devant la prairie des foules"(51). Both Renan and Barrès are victims of a rationalism which ultimately comes to appear to them as a wholly destructive and subversive force, and which is to become increasingly an object of attack for Barrès. His future reaction against Renan is a reaction also against Renanian rationalism; and

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(*) Renan's words to Déroulède - "Jeune homme, la France se meurt, ne troublez pas son agonie" - were well-known to Barrès, who quotes them in one of his articles. Was it with Renan in mind that he wrote in his 'Examen' of the 'Culte du moi' (1892) of the death of patriotism: "Notre morale, notre religion, notre sentiment des nationalités sont choses écroulées [...]"? (In Sous l'oeil des Barbares, éd. déf., Plon, 1922, p. 15. My italics).

he gives an indication of where his future 'solution' will lie in the closing words of an article of 1892: "Toute la petite maison bretonne, la délicieuse petite maison, pour une chimère!"(52).

As for the influence of Taine on the young Barrès, it is second only to that of Renan. What Barrès takes from Taine at this stage is above all two things: an outlook on life, and a method.

Perhaps even more than Renan, Taine is for Barrès the representative of an attitude of profound pessimism (but not of nihilism) and of withdrawal from life. Barrès was particularly struck by a number of formulae of Taine, which he later quotes in La Mort de Venise: "Nul homme réfléchi ne peut espérer"; "Le seul moyen efficace de supporter la vie, c'est d'oublier la vie"(53). The ultimate philosophy of Taine is that "le bonheur, c'est d'oublier la vie"; more especially, happiness can only be found in stifling the demon thought: whether the method chosen is immersion in work or retreat into dream, the goal is always the same: "C'est toujours l'oubli de soi-même"(54).

But Barrès also took over from Taine a method - that which he calls "cet incomparable instrument", analysis. In 1891 he declared Taine to be "le premier des analystes de ce temps"(55); and in an article on 'L'Influence de M. Taine' written on the death of the latter in 1893, the same fact is emphasized over and over again, almost to the total exclusion of all else: the works of Taine all have as their goal to demonstrate "l'excellence d'une certaine méthode", "une même méthode de raisonner et de comprendre"; Taine "fut notre professeur d'analyse", all of his works were written

"pour nous enseigner à analyser"; "M. Taine, c'est notre professeur de psychologie, le père vénéré des analystes"; "En résumé, nous expliquons M. Taine tout entier [...] comme étant l'homme de la méthode dite l'analyse"(56). This method of analysis will become a cornerstone of the 'Culte du Moi'. But ultimately such analysis dries up feeling, and ends by undermining all ideals and creating a sense of the vanity of all activity. Ultimately (but this is to anticipate), the influence of Taine joins that of Renan to create in Barrès a sense of incompatibility between thought and action, and a conviction of the inevitable corrosiveness of all thought (or of reason). Looking back in later years upon his early 'rationalist' mania, Barrès was to confess: "Je reconnais que dans certaines circonstances de ma vie active, je me serais évité des échecs, si j'avais pu écraser cette petite manie raisonneuse [...]"(57). And his view of the disillusionment and defeatism of both Taine and Renan, as well as of the consequences of their own rationalism, is well summed up in a passage written in later life:

> Renan et Taine sont morts en doutant de la vitalité française. Ils ont cru que les nouvelles générations vivraient de l'ombre d'une ombre et mourraient d'inanition morale. [...] ils ont passé leurs derniers jours à gémir devant la haute mer qu'ils n'avaient plus la force d'affronter. Ils désespéraient. C'est une conséquence de leur abus des analyses et des froids raisonnements. (58)

Barrès' extreme reaction to the teaching of Taine and Renan is doubtless in part attributable to his desperate need for a 'master' or leader who would impose certain values or goals upon him - and which he had failed to find(*).

(*) Cf. the hero of Sous l'oeil des Barbares, in his first encounter with M. X...: "Il lui pria de lui indiquer le but de la vie, en peu de mots, dans ce décor d'une fête de Paris." (Plon, 1922, p. 178).

But it is nonsense to say of Barrès at this time, as Bourget did, that he is a young man striving for an ideal (or as the latter puts it, an 'Ideal') beyond his attainment and despising everything that falls short of it(59). The real problem is that Barrès can find no given guiding ideal or belief or principle; the rest of his life will be spent in a struggle to attempt to create one.

(iii) Barrès' early analyses of contemporary thought and society: 'Le Nihilisme contemporain'.

At this point, it is worth glancing at Barrès' own early views of contemporary thought and society. He sets out in the manner of his friend and slightly senior advisor Paul Bourget to write his own 'Essais de psychologie contemporaine'(*). Barrès was particularly well qualified to discuss the literary-intellectual world of Paris in the mid-1880's. Not only had he been moulded by the chief philosophical influences of the day; but he had also, from the moment of his arrival in Paris, plunged into the midst of the 'decadent' and 'symbolist' ferment of these years. Henri Clouard, in a study of this period in Barrès' career, even goes so far as to maintain that "Barrès est sorti du symbolisme autant que de Taine et de Renan"(60); whilst Jean Moréas (author of the Manifeste symboliste of September 1885 and one of Barrès'

(*) Bourget, known to many in these years as "l'aîné des jeunes", and not yet the hardened reactionary he was later to become, was an object of extreme admiration for many budding writers in the early 1880's, whom he in turn encouraged. Barrès described him in 1887 as "un homme infiniment intelligent [...], l'artiste de cet instant qui réunit en lui le plus de manières de sentir et de comprendre" (Le Voltaire, 18 Nov. 1887). Personal contacts between the two men were close from an early date. Barrès explicitly uses the title 'Psychologie contemporaine' for his articles in Les Taches d'encre on Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle, and many of Bourget's intellectual and literary masters in his Essais (Taine, Renan, Stendhal, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Amiel) are also amongst Barrès' own.

closest literary friends at the time) wrote of Barrès, himself, Charles Vignier and Laurent Tailhade: "nous formions à nous quatre [...] le ban et l'arrière-ban de ce qui fut appelé décadence, déliquescence, symbolisme, ou d'un autre vocable"(61). Amongst the symbolist reviews to which Barrès contributed one can list Dujardin's newly refounded Revue Indépendante, Rod's Revue contemporaine, the ephemeral Le Symboliste of Kahn and Paul Adam, and a little later La Plume, and the anarcho-symbolist Revue Blanche(*). He himself interestingly described his Culte du Moi trilogy as an attempt as a "psychologie symboliste" in his reply to Huret's Enquête of 1891. Moreover, many contemporaries saw Barrès himself as a typical 'dandy', 'dilettante' and 'decadent' of the fin de siècle period; it is even possible that he is (with Moréas and Tailhade) one of the young aesthetes satirized in Les Déliquescences of 'Adoré Floupette'(62). Barrès in fact deliberately strove to create an image of himself as a thoroughgoing representative of his generation (even going so far as deliberately to cultivate in himself the neurasthenia which he believed he saw in so many of his contemporaries)(**). In return he came to exercise over

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(*) Barrès was also abreast of developments in two other fields whose influence can be felt in the literature of these years: contemporary 'psycho-pathology' (he took a special interest in the work of Charcot at La Salpêtrière); and the occultism of men such as Papus, Schuré, Péladan, Adam, and de Guaita (the last three he knew personally; it was a letter of recommendation from Péladan along with one from Bourget which persuaded Lemerre to publish Barrès' first novel).

(**) In this he was abundantly successful: Max Nordau, in his notorious Entartung (Berlin, 1892-93, Fr. trans. Dégénérescence, Paris, 1894), saw Barrès as one of the most typical 'degenerates' of his time! In fact, the early letters of Barrès contain several references to nervous disorders (Cf. H. MONDOR, Maurice Barrès avant le Quartier latin); whilst the extreme nervous disorders of the hero of Le Culte du Moi, in particular in the second volume, are in large part autobiographical.

his young contemporaries an influence which even the normally reserved Anatole France could describe as "une influence profonde, une sorte de fascination"(63). Naïve as some of the ideas expressed in Barrès' early writings may now seem, they are indicative to a remarkable extent of the outlook of a whole generation of young intellectuals.

(a) Science and critical rationalism:

In Barrès' view, his generation found itself intellectually, spiritually and morally in an impasse; the era was "cette queue de siècle où la vie dédaigne ses buts anciens"(64), but also of necessity an "heure de transition"(65). Behind all the particular manifestations of contemporary thought, Barrès sees the development of positivistic 'science', which has "envahi le domaine entier de la pensée"(66). His early essays show a certain veneration for science, learned perhaps from his masters Renan and Taine(*). But this soon turns to scepticism; the hopes placed in science are declared to be illusory, and the effect of this positivistic science upon contemporary thought is found to be wholly negative. The modern age is above all "une époque de critique", that is of critical and destructive rationalism (it is also, interestingly, "l'époque transformiste")(67).

Barrès finds in Leconte de Lisle the prime example of a 'sensibility' moulded by the conclusions of contemporary

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(*) Cf. in the article 'Maurice Rollinat', La Jeune France, March 1883: "seule la science peut être notre refuge". And in 'Anatole France', La Jeune France, Feb. 1883, pp. 601-2: "Que sont les plus brillantes fictions des poètes auprès des austères vérités de la science! Les imaginations d'Eschyle, de Shakespeare, de Hugo, font-elles pâlir un seul rayon de celles de Newton et de Darwin? // La science ne fait-elle pas flamber au coeur de l'homme moderne toute la foi, toutes les ardeurs, tous les dévouements, tous les fanatismes même que les religions essoufflées sont impuissantes à raviver?"

science and science-based philosophy, the expression of "ce sentiment moderne né des plus récentes hypothèses sur l'homme et l'univers"(68). He and writers like him

> estiment avec Taine que l'intelligence et l'histoire doivent être étudiées comme la physiologie ou la chimie; avec Renan, que toutes les religions furent vraies aussi longtemps qu'elles reflétèrent l'esprit humain qui se contemplait en elles. Ils adoptèrent l'hypothèse darwiniste qui voit dans toutes les formes de la vie les divers moments d'une même substance inconnaissable, et qui fait de la vie animale une longue chaîne dont le dernier anneau est l'homme. (69)

Thus the work of Leconte de Lisle has come to give 'definitive expression' to "une des formes du désenchantement moderne, et la plus morne"(70), a disillusionment which becomes a radical nihilism under the influence of the scientific doctrine of universal determinism.

But the work of the poet is significant for Barrès in another way also: in it can be seen "l'empiétement incessant de l'intelligence sur la sensibilité". Modern man is becoming more 'intellectual', more 'cerebral', and this intellectualism dries up feeling at the same time as a critical rationalism destroys all the old ideals of existence. The poetry of Leconte de Lisle expresses the situation of modern man, despairingly aware of the true nature of the universe and of his place in it and paralysingly conscious of himself. Barrès' conclusion is memorable if melodramatic:

> L'intelligence souffre et elle le sait. [...] L'ennui bâille sur ce monde décoloré par les savants. Tous les dieux sont morts et trop lointains; pas plus qu'eux notre idéal ne vivra. Une profonde indifférence nous envahit. [...] Chacun suit son chemin, sans espoir, le dégoût aux lèvres, dans un piétinement sur place, banal et toujours pareil [...]. (71)

(b) <u>Dilettantism, aestheticism, 'decadence'</u>:

It is this situation of philosophical and ethical bankruptcy which, for Barrès, lies behind the two outstanding

manifestations of the present literary generation: dilettantism and 'decadence'. The spiritual fathers of the two tendencies are, respectively, Renan and Baudelaire: "Renan et Baudelaire se partagent la génération qui naît"(72).

The term 'dilettantism', for the closing decades of the nineteenth century, describes an aristocratic, quasi-epicurean philosophy, inseparable from the self-conscious 'aestheticism' of these years, which conceives of life as but a succession of passing moments of refined pleasure and beauty which must be seized while they last. But it embraces also, for many literary-minded young men of France, the 'intellectual dilettantism' of Renan. Bourget, following the latter, gives in his Essais de psychologie contemporaine a definition of dilettantism which combines a quasi-scepticism with a voluptuous pursuit of pleasure; the dilettante neither negates nor affirms, but by a kind of empathy attempts to penetrate and embrace all doctrines and all modes of life:

> C'est beaucoup moins une doctrine qu'une disposition de l'esprit, très intelligente à la fois et très voluptueuse, qui nous incline tour à tour vers les formes diverses de la vie et nous conduit à nous prêter à toutes ces formes sans nous donner à aucune. (73)(*)

The dilettante is thus led to a kind of 'dédoublement' or

(*) Cf. Renan in his Dialogues philosophiques: "Pour moi, je goûte tout l'univers par cette sorte de sentiment général qui fait que nous sommes tristes en une ville triste, gais en une ville gaie. Je jouis ainsi des voluptés du voluptueux, des débauches du débauché, de la mondanité du mondain, de la sainteté de l'homme vertueux, des méditations du savant, de l'austérité de l'ascète. Par une sorte de sympathie douce, je me figure que je suis leur conscience. [...] Mon seul déplaisir est que ce siècle soit si bas qu'il ne sache plus jouir. Alors je me réfugie dans le passé, dans le XVIe siècle, le XVIIe, dans l'antiquité; tout ce qui a été beau, aimable, juste, noble me fait comme un paradis. Je défie avec cela le malheur de m'atteindre; je porte avec moi le parterre charmant de la variété de mes pensées." (Oeuvres complètes, tome I, p. 625).

multiplication of personalities as he successively embraces one attitude after another, yet without ever making of any one permanently his own. He is also led to despise the vulgar and the commonplace in his pursuit of beauty; at best he holds aloof from active involvement in the affairs of the world, at worst he withdraws into an ideal world of dream. The dilettante is also a practitioner of a constant cult of self-analysis; whilst his spiritual adventurism likens him to another widespread type in the fin de siècle portrait gallery, the 'cosmopolitan', the man who has no physical or spiritual homeland.

The attitude of universal comprehension, aristocratic elegance, cult of intelligence and ironical contempt for the vulgar and the commonplace inherent in this dilettantism certainly appealed to the young Barrès; it forms a basis of his 'Culte du Moi'. Its best application can be found in his first trilogy, and its best theoretical definition in Barrès' famous and provocative manifesto of 1888, 'La Sensibilité d'Henri Chambige'(*). In Chambige's "culture intime de ses émotions", his "dédain des lois ordinaires de la vie", and his "facile acceptation de la mort", Barrès finds "les traits principaux de l'âme contemporaine la plus neuve". To these features must be added also "la force de se dédoubler", and hence the ability, when necessary, to "sacrifier aux dieux de l'empire [...], de se conformer dans sa vie extérieure aux opinions communes". But in reality,

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(*) Chambige was a young intellectual, friend of Bourget, and practitioner of methods very similar to those of Barrès' 'Culte du Moi', who in January 1888 created a cause célèbre by killing his mistress and then attempting suicide. Bourget used him as a model for Robert Greslou in Le Disciple (1889); Barrès - to the scandal of his friend - wrote a kind of apology of Chambige and his crime.

> une âme bien née ne prend plus souci que de se cultiver, de s'augmenter, de s'embellir, de s'adorer. Dès lors, une seule chose est réelle, une seule chose importe: le Moi. Le monde extérieur n'apparaît plus que comme un champ d'expériences où l'âme, avec malaise, se hasarde pour trouver des émotions.(74)

The best formulation of this attitude of dilettantism or 'chambigisme' Barrès finds in Renan, paraphrasing the latter's celebrated definition in the words: "Grâce à sa merveilleuse méthode, M. Renan a su jouir en même temps des voluptés du voluptueux et de l'austérité de l'ascète". And he also quotes Renan's own words: "Il faut donc se composer un petit monde divin à soi, se tailler un vêtement dans l'infini; il faut pouvoir dire mon infini, comme mon Dieu."

Yet Barrès also points out that such an attitude rests on an experience of 'moral solitude' and of incommunicability - the belief that "jamais deux êtres ne peuvent se connaître", a "douloureux sentiment de l'invincible isolement où chacun de nous est plongé à jamais", and the consequent realisation that "nous n'aimons jamais que notre propre image projetée devant nous; nous sommes incapables de connaître rien autre que notre âme"(75). This ambiguity will underlie the whole of his Culte du Moi trilogy, expressing itself at times in strangely ironical or tongue-in-cheek affirmations(*). Later, Barrès will come to see the attitude of the dilettante as merely a form of nihilism which he will call a "déracinement moral"(76).

Closely related to the type of the dilettante is that of the 'decadent'. Whilst expressing a certain ironical reserve at the more fanciful extravagances of the decadent

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(*) A splendid example of this is his exclamation, strangely reminiscent of Mallarmé: "La beauté est un mensonge qu'il est glorieux de soutenir!" (Les Taches d'encre, No. 4, Feb. 1885, p. 1).

poets, Barrès nevertheless has a basic sympathy for "ces jeunes hommes de demain que la critique nomme décadents"(77), whose "tristesse morne" and "nihilisme tranquille" he welcomed(78). The decadent poet par excellence in this post-A rebours era is, of course, Baudelaire, the father of modern sensibility, whose Fleurs du Mal contain "l'essence de la culture moderne"(79); whilst the poetry of Verlaine expresses "le dernier degré d'énervement dans une race qui s'épuise". But behind the striving of these decadents after ever new sensations, Barrès sees once again a state of philosophical and ethical bankruptcy; all of them

> se trouvent en face de la vie également désarmés et inquiets d'idéal; ils s'agitent dans l'irrésolution. N'est-ce pas, d'ailleurs, la souffrance de tous, à cette queue de siècle où la vie dédaigne ses buts anciens? (80)

Dilettanti and decadents are thus united in a common "impuissance", a term which recurs time and time again in the writings of Barrès. His comments on the sense of 'impotence' afflicting his young contemporaries, their "découragement", their "peur de la vie", and "cette élégante impuissance de nos jeunes bacheliers", betray an underlying conception of life as struggle, a conception undoubtedly Darwinian in origin, though owing something also to the war of 1870 and the continuing 'threat' of Germany. Similarly, the 'impotence' and defeatism of which Barrès and many others speak is a consequence first and foremost of a lack of philosophical or ideological arms, but reflects also a certain mood or complex of national inferiority. Barrès will later be concerned with a political need for energy and direction (a concern reflected in the very title of his trilogy Le Roman de l'énergie nationale) in an attempt to reverse the

process of spiritual and ideological decline which he, in company with so many others of his time, sees as the tendency of the whole nineteenth century(*).

Perhaps more significant is Barrès' agreement with the 'decadent' view of his age (one which we have seen outlined by Bourget) as an era of progressive social disintegration. His expressions of this view are, at this stage, frequently naïve; yet they are important in that they contain the germ of his description developed, with the aid of Taine, of "la France dissociée et décérébrée" in Les Déracinés (1897). Like many fellow writers and intellectuals, moreover, Barrès is concerned at this early stage above all with the place of the writer-intellectual in the social whole. His enthusiasm for Vallès' trilogy Jacques Vingtras is here noteworthy; the second volume of this work, Le Bachelier (1881), is haunted by the image of the 'déraciné' intellectual who dies of hunger in the streets of Paris; and Jacques Vingtras was to exert an influence on Les Déracinés, whose fifth chapter, describing life in the Quartier latin, bears the interesting title: 'Un prolétariat de bacheliers et de filles'(**).

But although Barrès sees the elements of this disintegration of a traditional social fabric (drift to the cities,

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(*) Les Taches d'encre contain an interesting prophecy of Barrès' future intellectual development, along with that of his whole generation: "Dans vingt ans, nous tendrons les bras à quelque catholicisme un peu modifié." (No. 1, Nov. 1884, p.63).

(**) A further source of Barrès' ideas here is undoubtedly his own experience of isolation (and, at one stage, of extreme economic misery) in the Paris of his student days. He comments in his brochure Le Quartier latin. Ces Messieurs. Ces Dames: "Le sentiment de l'isolement, voilà toute l'explication de la vie au Quartier latin" (Paris, Dalou, 1888, p. 32). Many years later Barrès echoed the same view of the misery and loneliness of student life: "Je n'y veux plus penser et j'aimerais cent fois mieux entrer au cloître que retourner dans une chambre du Quartier latin." (Mes Mémoires, in Mes Cahiers, I, p. 49).

uprooting from the traditions and stable ways of life of the countryside, 'atomisation' of life in the big urban centres), he, along with the majority of his contemporaries, fails to see the fundamental economic causes of it. As with many another of his contemporaries steeped in a strong literary-intellectual background, Barrès - both now and later - sees the fundamental causes of this disintegration as lying in the realm of ideas - in the absence of spiritual and philosophical unity in the country as a whole. Much of the efforts of his maturity will consist of an attempt to restore that lost unity. But first, a new basis for action must be found.

(iv) Attempts to overcome nihilism: the 'Culte du Moi'.

The fullest portrait of Barrès at this time, and of the 'dilettante' and 'decadent' which many contemporaries saw in him, is to be found in his trilogy Le Culte du Moi(*). Whatever fictional elements may enter into Barrès' account of his hero's life in the trilogy, it is certain that the latter's intellectual development closely mirrors that of Barrès himself. Apart from the implicit evidence of the novels themselves, this fact is made explicit in the preface to Sous l'oeil des Barbares and in the Examen des trois romans idéologiques of 1892: in the former he stresses his 'sincerity' and his "probité de copiste"; and in the Examen

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(*) Sous l'oeil des Barbares, 1888; Un Homme libre, 1889; Le Jardin de Bérénice, 1891. In 1892 Barrès published an Examen des trois romans idéologiques, included in the second edition (1892) of Sous l'oeil des Barbares and in subsequent editions. Here Le Culte du Moi (underlined) refers to the novel trilogy, the term 'Culte du Moi' (in inverted commas) to the ideology of Barrès.

he claims that "ces premiers chapitres [...] sont la description sincère des couches profondes de ma sensibilité..."(81). The novels are also intended by Barrès to describe the intellectual dilemma of his own generation: he has written "la monographie des cinq ou six années d'apprentissage d'un jeune Français intellectuel", and provided "un renseignement sur un type de jeune homme déjà fréquent et qui, je le pressens, va devenir plus nombreux encore parmi ceux qui sont aujourd'hui au lycée"; he has also tried to "mettre en roman la conception que peuvent faire de l'univers les gens de notre époque"(82). In all this Barrès was highly successful. It would be hard to find a phrase which sums up so succinctly as 'le Culte du Moi' the aesthetic individualism of the age. Barrès' interest in devotional works such as Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and the mediaeval Imitation of Christ, though slightly facetious, is more than mere trimming; in a sense, Le Culte du Moi traces the via crucis of many a young bourgeois intellectual at the end of the nineteenth century(*).

(*) Later Barrès was to claim that the 'Culte du Moi' had evoked a tremendous response in the young people of his day: "Ils s'intéressèrent passionnément à une recherche qu'eux-mêmes eussent voulu entreprendre. Ce petit livre produisit dans certains jeunes esprits une agitation singulière." (Preface of 1904 to Un Homme libre). He even claims to have been in 1890, along with Verlaine, "l'auteur le plus lu par nos rhétoriciens et nos philosophes de Paris. A cette époque on se disputait s'il fallait être barrésiste ou barrésien." (ibid.). In Amori et dolori sacrum he wrote that "le 'Culte du Moi' répondait certainement à une disposition de la jeunesse dans les dernières années, à une disposition qui n'avait jamais encore été exprimée et satisfaite à ce degré. Combien de jeunes lecteurs me l'ont dit et me le répètent encore..." (Paris, Juven, 1903, p. 307).

Following the publication of Un Homme libre, the review La Plume devoted a special issue to L'Ethique de Maurice Barrès. Jean Jaurès and Maurice Blondel cited Barrès in their doctoral theses, whilst, less agreeably, Barrès was to hear sarcastic reference made during his early years in parliament to "le Moi de M. Barrès". Jean de Tinan claimed in 1896 that Barrès had been "notre éducateur, notre professeur d'énergie" (Cit. P. /

The starting-point of Barrès' 'Culte' is the idea of the collapse of all existing or inherited values in the world around him, a fact which he never tires of repeating. The result is a falling back upon the 'self', seen as the sole remaining source of value and meaning in the world:

> Notre morale, notre religion, notre sentiment des nationalités sont choses écroulées [...] auxquelles nous ne pouvons plus emprunter de règles de vie, et, en attendant que nos maîtres nous aient refait des certitudes, il convient que nous nous en tenions à la seule réalité, au Moi. (83)(*)
>
> Le premier point, c'est d'exister. (84)
>
> L'important, c'est soi.
> N'oublie jamais ce conseil d'un sage: ne s'attacher qu'à soi. Tout est vain, tout est futile, hors ce qui touche à notre moi. (85)

This "égotisme", as Barrès calls it, consists of several elements, certain of which have already been seen in his article on Chambige: a cult of 'self-development' ("Se développer soi-même pour soi-même"(86)), and a typically decadent cult of ever-more-refined sensations (the hero of Sous l'oeil des Barbares lovingly cultivates "les délicates nuances de [son] Moi"(87)). It is above all in the second volume of the trilogy, however, that the 'Culte du Moi' receives its fullest development. Here it is presented as an intellectual and moral dilettantism (Barrès in fact describes it as an "haut dilettantisme"(88)) which is clearly and provocatively formulated in the 'Dédicace' to the novel.

(*) An exactly similar sentiment was expressed, possibly /Cont.

Cont. from previous page:
/ MOREAU, Maurice Barrès, Paris, 1946, p. 211). While among the many thousands of "ces jeunes gens de 1888, alors bien inconnus de lui, que la première ligne de Barrès perdit de curiosité et d'admiration" was the young Charles Maurras, whose early intellectual development was to follow along very similar lines (Cf. MAURRAS, Maîtres et témoins de ma vie d'esprit, Flammarion, 1953).

Its starting-point is the idea that, since nothing is true and nothing is of any importance, the individual self can (with the same degree of detachment) hold all beliefs and experience all emotions possible:

> L'essentiel est de se convaincre qu'il n'y a que des manières de voir, que chacune d'elles contredit l'autre, et que nous pouvons, avec un peu d'habileté, les avoir toutes sur un même objet. (89)

The result is an intellectual and moral "vagabondage", and a method of "dédoublement" of the personality, practised by the hero of the Culte du Moi and systematized by Barrès in a series of formulas in the trilogy and elsewhere: "se garder en même temps qu'on paraît se donner"(90); "Prêtons-nous aux circonstances"(91); "Se prêter, non se donner"(92). Such an emphasis on the arbitrary nature of all acts opens the door to a cult of action for action's sake. And the deliberately paradoxical 'règle de vie' of Barrès' 'homme libre' leads to just such a conclusion. The search for happiness is as illusory as the search for truth; the only satisfaction is to be found in the search itself:

> Chercher continuellement la paix et le bonheur, avec la conviction qu'on ne les trouvera jamais, c'est toute la solution que je propose. Il faut mettre sa félicité dans les expériences qu'on institue, et non dans les résultats qu'elles semblent promettre. Amusons-nous aux moyens, sans souci du but. (93)

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/ in echo of Barrès (but two years before the appearance of the above-quoted lines) in 1890 by Alfred Vallette, founder-editor of the Mercure de France (and, incidentally, close friend of Jarry): "... la faillite de Jéhovah est avérée, la Nature est mauvaise conseillière, l'Homme est un loup pour l'homme; de quelque côté que nous nous tournions, c'est, tracé en hiéroglyphes de cendres, le formidable NIHIL. Alors, comme il faut vivre, nous nous résignons à ne compter que sur nos propres forces, et nous opposons à la désolante et universelle négation cette affirmation résolue: MOI." (Cit. Claude DIGEON, La Crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914, P.U.F., 1959, p. 411, Note.)

The 'Culte du Moi' is therefore a mixture of intellectual scepticism and dilettantism, and of emotionalism. But a further element also enters: the cult of perpetual self-analysis. "Notre délice", says Philippe (the hero of Un Homme libre), "est de nous analyser avec minutie"(94). His ideal is to be in a state of perpetual exaltation coupled with a complete lucidity: "le paradis c'est d'être clairvoyant et fiévreux"(95). And:

> Quand on a l'honneur d'être, à un pareil degré, passionné et réfléchi, il faut soigner en soi une particularité aussi piquante. Raffinons soigneusement de sensibilité et d'analyse. (96)

The whole is summed up in the "programme de Jersey":

> PREMIER PRINCIPE: Nous ne sommes jamais si heureux que dans l'exaltation.
> DEUXIÈME PRINCIPE: Ce qui augmente beaucoup le plaisir de l'exaltation, c'est de l'analyser. [...]
> CONSÉQUENCE: Il faut sentir le plus possible en analysant le plus possible. (97)

The source of this 'Culte du Moi' in Taine and Renan is easy to see, though other influences as well are present(*). The most important source is undoubtedly Renan. Indeed, Barrès, rightly or wrongly, makes of Renan in Sous l'oeil des Barbares an explicit advocate of the fundamental egoism of the 'Culte'; the 'vieillard' of chapter 1 is made to say:

> nos idées influent-elles sur nos actes? - Et quand nous savons si peu connaître nos actes, pouvons-nous apprécier nos idées? - Attachons-nous à l'unique réalité, au Moi. (98)

(*) Barrès' 'Culte' may owe something also to Goethe, one of his life-long admirations. According to F. E. ROSS, Goethe in Modern France (cit. P. OUSTON, Myth and Action in Maurice Barrès' 'Culte du Moi'), there existed in France from 1880 onwards a kind of Goethe-cult, centering around what was usually called "la culture du moi" (a term Barrès later claimed to be preferable to "Culte du Moi"). Certainly Barrès' concept that "Notre Moi [...] n'est pas immuable; il nous faut le défendre chaque jour et chaque jour le créer" (Examen, in Sous l'oeil des Barbares, Plon ed., pp. 21-22), described as "cette éthique", is strongly reminiscent of a similar concept in Goethe, found in particular in Faust, Part II. Cf. also /Cont.

Whilst M. X... of chapter 4 of the novel preaches a vision of the world from which all moral values are absent, in which nothing is of any importance (or in which all things are of equal importance), and in which life is "un verger où vous n'avez qu'à vous satisfaire, ingénument, par mille gymnastiques"(99). His advice to his young disciple is: "C'est à vous-même qu'il faut vous attacher [...] vivons en dedans. Soyons idéalistes..."; the rest is merely "[d']imparfaites images de votre âme [...] que vous projetez sur le monde"(100). The concept of analysis, on the other hand, is taken directly from Taine. But where for Taine this analysis was merely a tool or a method, designed to further the scientific study of man and the world and to add to the general body of knowledge, for Barrès it becomes a 'règle de vie'; moreover, the only object to which he can now apply this analysis is his own 'self'; it is an instrument for classifying and organising his own inner life.

Who are the 'Barbares' towards whom such hostility is felt? In the Examen des trois romans idéologiques, Barrès vigorously denies that 'barbarian' is synonymous with 'bourgeois': "Grave erreur de prêter à ce mot de barbares la signification de "philistin" ou de "bourgeois". Quelques-uns s'y méprirent tout d'abord."(101) Despite this, the term does at times have such a resonance: the 'barbarians' seem to be (like the 'bourgeois' of Sartre's Roquentin) those who are established in the world and respected, full of self-

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/ Un Homme libre: "coupant sans cesse derrière moi, je veux que chaque matin la vie m'apparaisse neuve, et que toutes choses me soient un début" (Plon, éd. déf., 1922, p. 237).

importance and the conviction of their own right(102). But the full significance of the term is much broader than this; the barbarians are all those "qui de la vie possèdent un rêve opposé à celui qu'il [the hero, Philippe] s'en compose" and who "veulent le [Philippe] plier à leur image"(103); that is to say, they are everyone and everything outside of Philippe's moi: "Les Barbares, voilà le non-moi, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui peut nuire ou résister au Moi"(104); "Qu'on le classe vulgaire ou d'élite, chacun, hors moi, n'est que barbare"(105). But it is not only those whose beliefs and values are different from those of Philippe who are barbarians; it is also, significantly, those who hold any firm beliefs or values. "Nous sommes les Barbares", the latter sing in chorus, "nous sommes les convaincus."(106) And of these Barrès says curtly: "je les hais"(107).

The aim of the free man is to sever all contact between himself and the 'barbarians', or at least to free himself from any and every influence they may exert upon him. Thus he will be free to create his own world (or his own dream-world) - "une vision personnelle de l'univers, quelque rêve à ma taille, où me réfugier, moi, homme libre"(108) - and, beyond this, to 'create himself'. Armed with the weapon of analysis, the free man will attempt to go one stage further than the dilettantism of Renan: to a detachment not only from all beliefs and values, but also from himself; he will exist in a perfect state of 'disponibilité', able to control, and even to create at will, his own emotions. Inspired by a vision of a perfectly disciplined company of soldiers marching to the command of their officer, Philippe conceives the following image of himself:

> Et, frémissant jusqu'à serrer les poings du désir de dominer la vie, je me replongeai dans l'étude des moyens pour posséder les ressorts de mon âme comme un capitaine possède sa compagnie. - Quelque jour, un statisticien dressera la théorie des émotions, afin que l'homme à volonté les crée toutes en lui et toutes en un même moment. (109)

It is to this end that he uses the spiritual exercises of Loyola and other forms of religious meditation - methods applied by Barrès, as Maurras nicely put it in 1894, "à la méditation et à l'adoration du moi humain fait Dieu"(110).(*) By this means his soul will become like a 'mechanical organ' - strangely reminiscent of Huysmans' des Esseintes!

> Mon rêve fut toujours d'assimiler mon âme aux orgues mécaniques,et qu'elle me chantât les airs les plus variés à chaque fois qu'il me plairait de presser sur tel bouton. (111)

> Mon âme mécanisée est toute en ma main, prête à me fournir les plus rares émotions. Ainsi je deviens vraiment un homme libre! (112)

A final feature of Barrès' 'Culte du Moi' which we must examine here is its tendency to adopt the solipsism of a number of the symbolists, studied in a previous chapter. It is not only the relativity of 'truth' that Barrès affirms, but also - time and time again - the relativity of 'reality' itself. The preface to Sous l'oeil des Barbares begins with the affirmation:

> La réalité varie avec chacun de nous puisqu'elle est l'ensemble de nos habitudes de voir, de sentir et de raisonner. (**)

(*) Cf. Un Homme libre, Plon ed., p. 39: "Les ordres religieux ont créé une hygiène de l'âme qui se propose d'aimer parfaitement Dieu; une hygiène analogue nous avancera dans l'adoration du Moi. C'est ici, à Saint-Germain, un institut pour le développement et la possession de toutes nos facultés de sentir; c'est ici un laboratoire de l'enthousiasme."

(**) An article of 1890 repeats the idea in the same terms: "La réalité [...] est même un mot dépourvu de sens. // La réalité, on ne peut trop le répéter, varie avec chacun de nous; elle est l'ensemble de nos habitudes de voir, de sentir et de raisonner." And Barrès quotes (from an unidentified source): "L'univers est une fresque que nous composons, avec un génie plus ou moins facile de décorateur." ('Jean Moréas, symboliste', Le Figaro, 25 Dec. 1890).

And the hero of the novel is haunted by a sense of the unreality of phenomena(113). There are even suggestions not only that the *moi* alone shapes the world, but also that the *moi* alone exists and that it *creates* the world: "Moi qui suis la loi des choses, et par qui elles existent dans leurs différences et dans leur unité", exclaims Philippe(114). The hand of Fichte (or of Schopenhauer interpreted in the light of Fichte) may well be at work here; Philippe, in *Un Homme libre*, avidly reads Fichte, and Barrès directly expresses his admiration for the German philosopher in the first of his *Cahiers*(115).(*) The image of Narcissus, in fact, hangs over the whole of the trilogy, and the epigraph to chapter 2 of *Sous l'oeil des Barbares* - "un baiser sur un miroir" - applies to the whole of the 'Culte du Moi'. In opposition to Taine (chapter 6 of *Sous l'oeil des Barbares*, 'Extase', has as an epigraph Michelet's exclamation of protest on reading *De l'intelligence*: "Qu'on me rende mon moi!"), Barrès attempts to conceive of the *moi* as a metaphysical entity, autonomous and absolute, under no circumstances to be confused with the body, nor even with his 'thoughts' nor his 'soul'(116). But, as always - and this is the important point - the solipsism to which he tends is an inevitable

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(*) Cf. in *Un Homme libre*: "plus tard, dans l'intrigue de Paris, le soir, je me suis libéré de moi-même parmi les ivresses confuses de Fichte..." (Plon ed., p. 186). It is possible too that Barrès was influenced by the wild Fichtean 'idealism' of Wyzewa; he appears to have listened avidly to the latter's expositions of his metaphysics, and is said to have expressed a profound admiration for his 'intelligence' (Cf. P. OUSTON, *Myth and Action in Maurice Barrès' 'Culte du Moi'*, p. 44). In *Toute licence sauf contre l'amour*, Barrès gives an outline of Wyzewa's 'Fichtean' idealism, adding that such theories "ne contredisent nullement les hypothèses scientifiques sur la formation de la conscience de la série des êtres" (Paris, 1892, p. 12).

source of metaphysical and moral nihilism:

> J'existe, essence immuable et insaisissable, derrière ce corps, derrière ces pensées, derrière ces actes que vous me reprochez; je forme et déforme l'univers, et rien n'existe que je sois tenté d'adorer.
> Je me désintéresse de tout ce qui sort de moi. (117)

(v) Failure of the 'Culte du Moi' to create new values.

Does the 'Culte du Moi', despite this apparently unpromising start, end in the creation of new values? We must first recapitulate briefly on the exact meaning for Barrès of the term 'values'. Barrès saw his own era as one in which "la vie dédaigne ses buts anciens"(118). "C'est de manquer d'énergie et de ne savoir où se prendre que souffre le jeune homme moderne", he wrote in 1892(119). What Barrès asks of Renan is "de lui indiquer le but de la vie"(120); and he wrote in 1904 that he had sought in the 'Culte du Moi' "une raison de vivre et une discipline", and a philosophical basis for his actions(121). This is in fact his constant preoccupation, and his whole effort is directed towards the discovery of some new, given goal which will impose order and direction - "une direction unique"(122) - on his life, thereby overcoming the paralysing sense of 'absurdity' which afflicted him as a young man, and the nihilism (or 'anarchism', as he later likes to call it) of these years(*).

(*) Cf. his letter to Jean Herluison, published in the Revue critique des idées et des livres, 10 Feb. 1911, pp. 334-5: "Il me semble qu'à l'âge où j'avais vingt ans, les forces anarchistes, je veux dire le génie destructeur, l'audace de l'analyse et du nihilisme, étaient encore plus virulentes chez mes camarades et chez moi qu'elles ne sont chez les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui." [The 'anarchy' of the 1880's and 1890's is a term much beloved by the partisans of the French Right from around 1890 onwards. Its meaning is as defined above.]

For this new goal or supreme value to be effective it must, firstly, be (or appear to Barrès to be) 'given' from outside himself, and secondly, impose itself upon him with sufficient force and conviction to overcome the sense of 'directionlessness' and the nihilistic consciousness of his youth.

Barrès' claim (usually made some years later, looking back on the Culte du Moi trilogy) is that, through the practices of the 'Culte' (or as he later prefers to call it, "la culture du moi"), he has been led to the discovery of forces within himself deeper than the self-conscious, thinking ego: to the discovery of the power of 'instinct', of the 'unconscious', and ultimately of a kind of 'collective unconscious' which he variously calls "l'âme populaire", "l'âme de la race", "l'âme des foules", and so on. And in these he has found a basis for action, a driving force which pushes him in a given direction and reveals to him the path which he must follow. Like Laforgue, Barrès has tried to overcome his nihilism by a utilisation of Hartmann and the German philosopher's concept of an Unconscious which is at once psychological, physiological and metaphysical; he claims to have produced "une théorie de l'amour" in which he has "mis Hartmann en pratique"(123).(*) Barrès is at pains, moreover, to rebut claims that he is guilty of a philosophic-

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(*) Cf. Laforgue, Mélanges posthumes: "Il est un domaine qui, on le sait, vient d'ouvrir à la science les forêts vierges de la vie, c'est l'atmosphère occulte de l'être, l'inconscience...". He calls the Unconscious "le dernier divin, le principe mystique universel".

And Barrès: the Unconscious is "l'énergie créatrice, la sève du monde" (Le Jardin de Bérénice, Plon, éd. déf., p.126). Le Jardin de Bérénice shows an "admirable vision du divin dans le monde, que sous le nom plus moderne d'inconscient, Philippe retrouva..." (ibid., p. 206). And in his reply to Huret's Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire of 1891, Barrès spoke of "l'inconscient qu'on peut appeler le divin". The idea of the 'unconscious' was in fact very much 'in the air' at the time, due in large part to Hartmann.

al 'jump' and to emphasize the logical continuity of his philosophical development. He writes in the Examen of 1892: "je me propose de souligner l'esprit de suite que j'ai mis dans ces trois volumes"(124); and in a later reply to René Doumic's accusations of apostasy he insists that his work shows "non pas des contradictions, mais un développement", using here as elsewhere the image of the tree to stress the continuity of this development:

> Ayant longuement creusé l'idée du "Moi" avec la seule méthode des poètes et des mystiques, par l'observation intérieure, je descendis parmi des sables sans résistance jusqu'à trouver au fond et pour support la collectivité. Les étapes de cet acheminement, je les ai franchies dans la solitude morale. Ici l'école ne m'aida point. Je dois tout à cette logique supérieure d'un arbre cherchant la lumière et cédant avec une sincérité parfaite à sa nécessité intérieure. (125)

A close examination of the Culte du Moi trilogy and of the Examen of 1892 reveals, however, that this perfect clarity and logical development is not to be found. The trilogy is shot through with contradictions; Barrès implicitly admits its confusion of ideas and tendencies in the 1904 preface to Un Homme libre when he writes: "J'écrivais pour mettre de l'ordre en moi-même et pour me délivrer, car on ne pense, ce qui s'appelle penser, que la plume à la main.[...] Je vivais dans une crise perpétuelle; ma pensée était, que dis-je! elle est encore une chose vivante, la forme de mon âme. Qu'est-ce que mon oeuvre? Ma personne toute vive emprisonnée." The only fair means of assessment, therefore, is to consider what appears to be the 'majority view' emerging from these works, and what appears to be Barrès' own final position at this time as revealed in the Examen and in other writings of the same date. Given this method, a number of important arguments prevail against the claims Barrès makes

for the effective creation of new values by the 'Culte du Moi', and for the continuity of his philosophical development.

First of all, in the elaboration (at this stage, at least) of the ideology of the 'collective unconscious', there is to be found a fundamental ambiguity. Two mutually contradictory doctrines are expressed parallel with each other: (i) the above concept of the moi discovering its true foundation in the collective unconscious, and (ii) a continuing expression of the view that it is the moi which shapes, and even 'creates', the world outside it - implying, therefore, that this new 'âme populaire' or 'unconscious' is an invention of the moi. This contradiction remains unresolved throughout the trilogy.

It can be seen most clearly in Un Homme libre, intellectually the densest of the three novels and, by Barrès' own admission, the central work of the trilogy. Indeed, Barrès' later affirmations of its importance are highly significant:

> je n'ai jamais écrit qu'un livre: Un Homme libre, et [...] à vingt-quatre ans j'y indiquais tout ce que j'ai développé depuis [...]. Un Homme libre, pauvre petit livre où ma jeunesse se vantait de son isolement! [...] Je me suis étendu, mais il demeure mon expression centrale. Si ma vue embrasse plus de choses, c'est pourtant du même point [redacted] que je regarde. (126)

If this be true, then any ambiguities which an analysis of Un Homme libre may reveal are of significance for the whole of Barrès' later development.

One can certainly see in the novel the beginnings of Barrès' later nationalist ideology: an identification with a small group of men ("la race") against all others (the latter now being the 'barbarians'), with the isolated individual now becoming part of an isolated and beleagured community or 'race'. "J'ai recherché en Lorraine la loi de mon développe-

ment [...] l'individu est mené par la même loi que sa race"(127). Here too the unconscious makes its first appearance, through which it is possible to approach 'God': "A suivre le travail de l'inconscient [...] j'ai trouvé la direction de Dieu"; "Les individus [...] ne sont que des fragments du système plus complet qu'est la race, fragment elle-même de Dieu."(128) Yet on the very same page as the first of these quotations, Barrès has spoken of "l'univers qu'on se crée"; whilst God has been defined only a few pages earlier as merely "la somme des émotions ayant conscience d'elles-mêmes"(129) (the moi and 'the universe' having been similarly defined as "la somme des émotions possibles"(130). And several chapters later, we again find the admission: "je crée mon idéal de tous les soupirs dont m'emplit la banalité de la vie"; and "ce qui importe uniquement, c'est mon moi du dedans! le Dieu que je construis. Mon royaume n'est pas de ce monde [...]; c'est un rêve plus certain que la réalité."(131) Most revealing of all is the Venetian episode in Un Homme libre, based on Barrès' own sojourn in that city which he claims to have been a turning-point in his life and in the composition of the trilogy: "C'est à Venise que j'ai décidé toute ma vie, c'est de Venise également que je pourrais dater ces ouvrages."(132) Yet so firmly is Barrès rooted in the solipsistic tendencies we are discussing that the experience he records is less a response to an external reality than the creation of his own Venice, a projection of his own self:

> Mes souvenirs, rapidement déformés par mon instinct, me présentèrent une Venise qui n'existe nulle part. Aux attraits que cette noble cité offre à tous les passants, je substituai machinalement une beauté plus sûre de me plaire, une beauté selon moi-même.

> Ses splendeurs tangibles, je les poussai jusqu'à l'impalpable beauté des idées, car les formes les plus parfaites ne sont que des symboles pour ma curiosité d'idéologue.
>
> Et cette cité abstraite, bâtie pour mon usage personnel, se déroulait devant mes yeux clos, hors du temps et de l'espace. Je la voyais nécessaire comme une Loi; chaîne d'idées dont le premier anneau est l'idée de Dieu. (133)

One cannot help wondering whether similar considerations apply to Barrès' 'Lorraine'. At the very least, a profound ambiguity remains, and it is noteworthy that at the end of the novel Philippe is still intent on strengthening "l'univers personnel que je/me suis construit pour y trouver la paix"(134). Finally, it is significant that even in the Examen des trois romans idéologiques of 1892, after the developments of Le Jardin de Bérénice, one finds alongside the thesis according to which the analyst of the trilogy has 'discovered' the forces of instinct and the Unconscious, a return to the view that any vision of the world we may hold is a 'creation' of the moi:

> "C'est nous qui créons l'univers", telle est la vérité qui imprégne chaque page de cette petite oeuvre. [...] Le Moi [...] crée conformément à lui-même; il suffit qu'il existe réellement, qu'il ne soit pas devenu un reflet des Barbares, et dans un univers qui n'est que l'ensemble de ses pensées régnera la belle ordonnance selon laquelle s'adaptent nécessairement les unes aux autres les conceptions d'un cerveau lucide. (135)

Secondly, in Un Homme libre, the stand-point of Barrès remains fundamentally the same after the Lorraine and Venice episodes as before, and in the Examen of 1892. Philippe's basic concern is still with subjecting his moi to as wide a range of 'experiences' as possible; his aim is still "de sentir et d'analyser sans trêve", and to "aiguillonner [sa] sensibilité"(136) - and this despite the obvious fact that this constant analysis and self-stimulation have led to

neurosis and the drying-up of all feeling, leaving a sense of inner void, of sterility and dessication(*). The conclusion of the novel - Philippe's "Lettre à Simon" - is a return to the precise starting-point of the 'Culte du Moi' - an intellectual and moral dilettantism, a search for ever new sensations, an egotistical cult of the 'self' for its own sake:

> C'est une grande erreur de concevoir le bonheur comme un point fixe; il y a des méthodes, il n'y a pas de résultats. [...] Les désirs, les ardeurs, les aspirations sont tout; le but rien. [...] je vais recommencer nos curieuses expériences. (137)

Lorraine and Venice appear here as merely passing (and now forgotten) episodes; they appear at this point of the novel to have been for Barrès merely - as he says of so many other things - "un prétexte à [s]'échauffer"(138). The closing lines of this letter express Philippe's aim to be

> Etranger au monde extérieur, étranger même à mon passé, étranger à mes instincts, connaissant seulement des émotions rapides que j'aurai choisies: véritablement Homme libre! (139)

Moreover, even in Le Jardin de Bérénice something of the original 'Culte du Moi' remains. Philippe is still concerned to "créer des sentimentalités nouvelles pour les projeter sur [son] univers qui se fane"(140). Whilst the Examen dwells only briefly on the thesis of Le Jardin de Bérénice, returning again to the standpoint of the 'homme libre', as Barrès tells his contemporaries "d'un ton fort assuré":

(*) Barrès recognizes this to be the effect of his constant self-analysis in the preface to Trois Stations de psychothérapie (1891), admitting implicitly also the failure of the 'Culte du Moi', at least as outlined in Sous l'oeil des Barbares and Un Homme libre: "Eh! certes, je le sais bien que, sous couleur d'être analystes, nous ne sommes que des nihilistes, des âmes sèches, des cerveaux incapables de sentir efficacement et avec suite, organisés uniquement pour la négation." (Introduction, p. xvi.)

> Il n'y a qu'une chose que nous connaissions et qui existe réellement parmi toutes les fausses religions qu'on te propose, parmi tous ces cris du coeur avec lesquels on prétend te rebâtir l'idée de patrie, te communiquer le souci social et t'indiquer une direction morale. Cette seule réalité tangible, c'est le Moi, et l'univers n'est qu'une fresque qu'il fait belle ou laide.
>
> Attachons-nous à notre Moi, protégons-le contre les étrangers, contre les Barbares. (141)

The 'règle de vie' proposed is still the same: feed and stimulate the moi as one throws coal on a fire; it is still "la science du mécanisme de son Moi qui lui permet de varier à sa volonté le jeu"(142).

Clearly, the 'Culte du Moi' (at least as outlined in Sous l'oeil des Barbares, Un Homme libre and the Examen) has failed in its attempt to discover or to create any effective new values. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could, since the aims of the 'homme libre' are in fact completely nihilistic. All values, of whatever nature, are declared to be merely the product of a 'mechanism' of social or religious conditioning; they are all merely prejudices from which the 'free man' must detach himself. As Un Homme libre puts it:

> A tout ce qui est épars dans le monde, l'opinion a attaché une façon de sentir déterminée, et ne permet guère qu'on la modifie. Nous éprouvons des sentiments de respectueuse émotion devant une centaine d'anecdotes ou devant de simples mots peut-être vides de réalité. Voilà la mécanique à laquelle toute culture soumet l'humanité, qui, la plupart du temps, ne se connaît même point comme dupe. (143)

The free man's 'recreation' of the world and of himself - or his creation of a "vision personnelle de l'univers" in which to take refuge - which follows this detachment is a glorification of the power of the will alone: the ideal 'free man' would carry the intellectual and moral dilettantism of Barrès so far as to be able to create in himself at will the ideas,

beliefs, emotions and sensations he chose, none of which will be binding upon him, none of which will be more than a passing experience. The freedom of the 'homme libre' - a sterile detachment from all things - is a freedom of 'absurdity', a 'liberté, pour quoi faire?'. The influence of Schopenhauer's 'will' may well lurk behind such a development, as it undoubtedly lies (in part at least) behind Barrès' and the symbolists' solipsistic tendencies; and once again, the effect of this influence is nihilistic. The 'homme libre' in fact is a perfect example of Bourget's young 'nihiliste délicat' in Le Disciple (1889) - an identification implied by Bourget and later admitted by Barrès himself(*). If such is the ideal of the 'homme libre' and the conclusion of the second volume of the trilogy, then it is evident that, despite Barrès' later claims for the continuity of his thought, his later nationalist ideology, with its doctrine of 'enracinement', represents a complete rejection and renunciation of this ideal and this conclusion. The ideal of the 'free man' is to be completely undetermined; nationalism, in the terms of Barrès' own

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(*) Cf. the terms of Bourget's description, as cited by Barrès in the 1904 Preface to Un Homme libre: "Celui-ci a toutes les aristocraties des nerfs, toutes celles de l'esprit [...] c'est un épicurien intellectuel et raffiné... Ce nihiliste délicat, comme il est effrayant à rencontrer et comme il abonde! A vingt-cinq ans, il a fait le tour de toutes les idées. Son esprit critique, précocement éveillé, a compris les résultats derniers des plus subtiles philosophies de cet âge. [...] il n'a jamais cru, il ne croira jamais à aucune [religion], pas plus qu'il ne croira jamais à quoi que ce soit, sinon au jeu de son esprit qu'il a transformé en un outil de perversité élégante. Le bien et le mal, la beauté et la laideur, les vices et les vertus lui paraissent des objets de simple curiosité. L'âme humaine toute entière est, pour lui, un mécanisme savant et dont le démontage l'intéresse comme un objet d'expérience. Pour lui, rien n'est vrai, rien n'est faux, rien n'est moral, rien n'est immoral. C'est un égoïste subtil et raffiné [...]."

definition, is "l'acceptation d'un déterminisme"(144).

What then of Le Jardin de Bérénice? It is of course impossible to deny the reality of the ideological developments of the novel (just as one cannot deny the existence in Un Homme libre of similar ideas, however much they may be contradicted by other ideas). But it does seem that these new doctrines are far from carrying complete conviction for Barrès at this time, and that they tend even to occupy a subordinate status in his thought as a whole(*). Le Jardin de Bérénice was written largely as an attempt to provide a theoretical justification for Barrès' early involvement in politics, and when he later looks back on the trilogy of Le Culte du Moi he tends to overlook this volume. It is significant that when he later reviews the course of his intellectual development, he claims to see a line going directly from Un Homme libre to Les Déracinés and the later works, bypassing or ignoring the developments of Bérénice(145).

In fact, the failure of the 'Culte du Moi' to create or discover any effective new values, paradoxical as it may seem, was foreseen by Barrès in the final chapter of Sous l'oeil des Barbares with its famous 'oraison'. In the logical development of the 'Culte du Moi', this prayer is out of place here, since it immediately follows Philippe's outline of a programme which will be that of Un Homme libre. But it indicates, along with Philippe's "affaissement", a premature (?)

(*) Similarly, it seems certain that the letter of 'Sénèque le philosophe' to 'Lazare le ressuscité'(contrasting the attitude of the sceptical, dilettante philosopher with that of the fanatic), which occurs towards the end of Le Jardin de Bérénice, was intended by Barrès to mark his adieu to the dilettantism of Renan. The title of this final volume of the trilogy was originally to have been Qualis artifex pereo!, the famous words of the dying Nero, translated by Barrès as: "Quel artiste, quel fabricant d'émotions je tue!" (Plon, 1920, p.180). But in fact the sceptic and dilettante in Barrès was far from dead at this stage.

recognition of the ultimate failure of the 'Culte du Moi'. Philippe cries out for a "Maître" who will impose a goal and direction upon his life:

> Toi seul, ô mon maître [...] je te supplie que par une suprême tutelle, tu me choisisses le sentier où s'accomplira ma destinée.
>
> Toi seul, ô maître, si tu existes quelque part, axiome, religion ou prince des hommes. (146)

The terms of this prayer are significant in view of Barrès' later development: it involves not only a renunciation of the complete independence and indetermination of the 'homme libre', but ~~sf~~ the suggestion also of a renunciation of independent thought and judgement ("Je sais que ce fut mon tort et le commencement de mon impuissance de laisser vaguer mon intelligence, comme une petite bête qui flaire et vagabonde"(147)), and even of responsibility ("O maître, maître [...] que je voudrais aimer, servir, en qui je me remets!"(148)). And as a final confirmation of the failure of the 'Culte du Moi', it is significant that the Examen of 1892 ends with a repetition of the now familiar theme of the collapse of all existing values, and the same implicit cry for a 'maître' of some kind who will provide new ones: "En effet, nous serions enchanté que quelqu'un survînt qui nous fournît des convictions..."(149).(*)

(*) An additional paragraph in the original (1892) edition of this Examen, deleted from subsequent editions, expresses an optimism that new values will eventually be found; but Barrès has for the moment nothing to offer. A further interesting addition is the note: "à notre avis la négation n'a pas fini sa tâche. Sans doute, le programme des destructions nécessaires a été rédigé, mais il faut chaque jour lui ajouter pour le maintenir en face des affirmations sans cesse renaissantes ou aggravées des divers dogmatismes."

It was in this call for a 'maître', above all, that many young contemporaries appear to have seen in Barrès their spokesman. Cf. L. DUMONT-WILDEN, Le Crépuscule des Maîtres, p. 120 (speaking admittedly for the youth of Belgium rather than of France): "Nous répétions tous, jeunes gens "fin de siècle", la phrase du personnage symbolique de Maurice Barrès,/

Cont.

A glance, finally, at two other works written in the period 1891-92 shows Barrès' outlook still to be fundamentally that of the 'homme libre'. Trois stations de psychothérapie (1891), whilst expressing a certain optimism that the 'goal' Barrès is seeking will eventually be found, contains a recognition of the disastrous effects of perpetual self-analysis and an implicit admission of the failure of the 'Culte'. Whilst in Toute licence sauf contre l'amour (1892), Barrès' refusal to be called a 'sceptic' "au sens ordinaire du mot" does not hide his continuing rejection of the values of the world around him - these are merely "tracas pompeux" and "niaise trépidation" - and his failure to discover or to create effective new ones: "A quel souci se dévouer et sur quelle idée se grouper? Là gît tout le problème. Le secret de notre dégoût est dans la niaiserie des buts proposés à notre activité."(150) Moreover, there is still the same intellectual dilettantism as before - "La vérité, en même temps qu'elle affirme un objet, ne nie pas son contraire. [...] Bien connaître une chose, c'est apercevoir même les motifs qu'il y a d'en douter." -, and the same cry for a 'Maître' (referred to this time as "un Bonaparte") who will provide guidance (150A). Barrès' quest for intellectual certainty, up to this point at least, is far from having succeeded.

(vi) From nihilism to politics: Barrès' early political involvement.

A major paradox nonetheless remains to be solved. How

Cont. from previous page:
/ le Barrès de Sous l'oeil des Barbares: "Toi seul, ô mon Maître, si tu existes quelque part, axiome, religion, ou prince des hommes"."

is one to explain Barrès' startling evolution from the nihilism of his youth and early manhood to the deliberate political commitment of his maturity? The process began, in fact, in 1888 with his return to Nancy as editor of the pro-Boulangist Courrier de l'Est and the commencement of an energetic campaign for election to the Chambre des Députés. In October 1889 he obtained election as Boulangist member for one of the three Nancy constituencies (although by this time the Boulangist movement was rapidly disintegrating), holding his seat for the next three years, though taking little part in parliamentary affairs, his main activity being literary and journalistic. His startled contemporaries were at a loss to explain this apparent volte-face on the part of such an apostle of absolute individualism. The reasons behind this, and behind Barrès' subsequent evolution, are worth probing; indeed, his attempts to escape from the impasse of his early nihilism are perhaps even more interesting and revealing than the sources and expression of that nihilism itself.

In fact, a complex of reasons lies behind Barrès' political involvement. But one thing that is not involved at this stage, it is worth noting, is any sense of 'enracinement' in his native Lorraine(*).

(a) Dilettantism and escape from moral solitude:

An element of the dilettantism of the 'Culte du Moi'

(*) Cf. the confession in the second of his Cahiers (1901): "Ce n'est point aisément que j'ai aimé la Lorraine. A dix ans, à vingt ans, à trente ans, je m'y tenais pour un exilé." (Mes Cahiers, II, p. 45).
It is significant, too, that Philippe in Le Jardin de Bérénice deliberately chooses the constituency of Arles in which to stand for election, after having made "les démarches convenables et discuté avec les personnes qui savent le mieux la géographie" (Plon ed., p. 15).

undoubtedly enters into Barrès' plunge into politics; political action contained an element of 'sport', and a further field of 'experiences' for his moi to feed upon. In Sous l'oeil des Barbares there is a prediction of political involvement which presents it as a 'game' whose formula is the familiar "se garder en même temps qu'on paraît se donner"(151). Philippe in Un Homme libre declares: "Je suis entré dans le monde du Palais, de la littérature et de la politique sans certitudes, mais avec des émotions violentes"(152). In Le Jardin de Bérénice he still admits that his political involvement is in large part a means to "jeter du charbon sous [sa] sensibilité qui commençait à fonctionner mollement"(153). Whilst later, in his Mémoires, Barrès admits that in politics "la grande affaire aura été pour moi de trouver [...] de quoi nourrir mon imagination, ma sensibilité, mon âme"(154).(*)

Such reasons, however, are relatively minor. More pressing was the need simply to escape from the tortures of a morbid nervous depression brought on by the self-enclosement and moral solitude of these years, the need to find a bridge back to the outside world and to a communion with others. In the winter of 1887 Barrès had already been forced to take a holiday in Italy to recover from a "surmenage cérébral"; and he even speaks of a threat of madness hanging over him:

> Oui, j'ai failli être fou. Je ne sais plus ce qui me sauva. Si, je le sais: la politique. Pourquoi j'aime la politique? D'abord, je lui dois la vie. J'avais

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(*) Cf. also in an article in Le Figaro, 27 Oct. 1889, shortly after his election: "Délicieuses bagarres de septembre et d'octobre! Incomparable ballotage! C'est là que je me suis mis à comprendre, à aimer la vie, l'instinct tout nu."
Towards the end of his life, Barrès noted in his Cahiers, speaking of his support for the Boulangist movement: "Comme je me suis amusé! Il y avait bien de la fantaisie, de l'allégresse de jeunesse, l'idée d'embêter le pion, le philistin, les grandes personnes [...]." (Mes Cahiers, XIV, p. 199).

> rêvé d'être un homme libre. Par orgueil de jeunesse, par réaction contre Burdeau, contre les basses tâches. Taine, après avoir lu l'Homme libre, me prédisait la folie, comme il appert d'une lettre qu'il écrivit à Bourget au sujet du Disciple, et que celui-ci n'a laissé publier qu'en supprimant ce trait. (155)

To some extent, Barrès seems to have found a sense of communion with others in the violent passions of his electoral campaign, in "le plaisir instinctif d'être dans un troupeau"(156). And it is undoubtedly this experience of emotional solidarity which lies at the root of the ideological developments of Le Jardin de Bérénice: the discovery of the forces of 'instinct', of "l'âme populaire"(*).

(b) Boulanger and the necessity of myth:

But how does one explain Barrès' attachment specifically to Boulanger and the Boulangist cause? How could as intelligent a young man have been taken in and swept along by a movement centering around a man whose showmanship and irresponsibility ought to have been obvious? Again, the reasons are complex(**).

(*) A similar evolution can be seen in Barrès' friend and fellow-writer Paul Adam, who stood for election (unsuccessfully) as Boulangist candidate for one of the two remaining Nancy constituencies (the third member of the trio was the Blanquist Gabriel). Adam had begun as an adherent of naturalism in literature, but had then passed through a 'decadent' and symbolist-solipsistic phase similar to that of Barrès (Cf. his Petit glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes of 1888, published under the pseudonym of Jacques Plowert, and the novel Soi). In 1895 he published a novel based on the Boulangist movement and his experience in it with the interesting title of Le Mystère des Foules.

(**) Boulanger had first come into public prominence in 1886 as War Minister, where his sweeping reforms of the army had rapidly made of the romantic soldier on his black charger a popular hero. The following year, when the threat of war with Germany again raised its ugly head, Boulanger came to incarnate the hopes of the revanchards. But in May of the following year he was dismissed from his post, becoming in popular eyes a martyr of the Republic and a champion of all those opposed to it, at least in its existing form. In March 1888 Boulanger / Cont.

In large part, Barrès' motivation was purely negative. The sense of perpetual dissatisfaction of his early years crystallises into a passionate hatred of the world in which he lives and its institutions. (In Sous l'oeil des Barbares, and again in Un Homme libre, Barrès speaks of his "dégoût universel"(157), and in a preliminary note to Le Jardin de Bérénice claims his political action to be a logical consequence of this disgust.) More exactly, diagnosing his own spiritual malady as a sense of sterility, an "anarchie intellectuelle", a lack of any one goal or purpose which will channel his energy and resources into one single direction, providing thus a source of unity, he projects this personal dilemma onto the nation as a whole: it too is divided, lacking in a common purpose, and the cause of this lies in its parliamentary institutions(*). In the opening round of his

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(*) This process of 'projection' can be seen from the moment of Barrès' first major political declaration onwards (Cf. 'M. le Général Boulanger et la nouvelle génération', Revue Indépendante, tome VII, No. 18, April 1888, pp. 55-63). His negative attitude is no mere literary 'pose' either. A survey of Barrès' journalistic writings of this period reveals his hostility to the world around him. With the exception of his literary admirations, his attitude to the values and the institutions of this world is overwhelmingly negative, frequently taking the form of a mocking contempt.

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/ became doubly a martyr when he was forced to retire from the army, and a Comité républicain de la protestation nationale (soon abbreviated to Comité national) was formed to support him in an attempted coup against the régime. The Right in particular took up Boulanger as a means of overturning the Republic, but his supporters ran the whole gamut from extreme left to extreme right: Blanquists who saw in him a potential dictator, numerous socialists hostile to the conservative Republic, vast numbers of workers spurred on by high unemployment, Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes, many in the Church and Army, and large numbers of Bonapartists and monarchists (his campaign was largely financed by the legitimist Duchesse d'Uzès). Although it eventually collapsed, the Boulangist movement is significant in the history of the Third Republic as marking the transition from an old-fashioned conservative-monarchist tradition to a more modern anti-parliamentary, plebiscitary and nationalist one, with dictatorial overtones - a perspective into which Barrès fits perfectly.

Boulangist campaign, Barrès declares, speaking in the name of "toute la jeunesse, [...] l'élite française": "C'est joyeusement [...], c'est avec joie et avec haine que je crie mon dégoût des institutions parlementaires"(158). The terms in which he vituperates these institutions in the course of his campaign are revealing. France is ruled by a despotic oligarchy of mediocre, self-seeking and dishonest politicians (it is they who are now 'the barbarians' who must be destroyed). Parliamentary government is merely a "bouffonnerie", a "bavardage stérile" condemning the country itself to sterility; the parliamentary régime "n'est qu'agitation dans le vide, désordre, corruption, mensonge et stérilité"; and it is this régime which is responsible for dividing the country, for tearing it apart, for frustrating its profound desire for unity(159).

The task which Boulanger is called upon to fulfil is above all one of destruction. "Boulanger représente l'opposition au régime parlementaire", he provides "le moyen de chasser les parlementaires"(160). Although Barrès may speak of the need for "une vraie République" in place of existing forms, his own explicit programme of action is more concerned simply with the abolition or destruction of the present system. No doubt, Boulanger also represents for Barrès certain more positive aims; a defence reflex against the threat of Germany (he incarnates "la confiance, l'espoir et l'idée de patriotisme"(161)), and an incarnation (against the rationalist Republic?) of the forces of instinct, of the unconscious, of "l'âme populaire" (Boulanger has the gift "de deviner le sentiment des masses, d'exprimer en relief l'instinct obscur de la foule illettrée"(162)). But although Barrès may bless

the hour "où m'est donnée la joie d'aimer et la joie de haïr avec ceux de ma race"(163), and may claim to find in the movement centering around Boulanger a source of national unity, a common purpose, the "belle idée" of "la réconciliation nationale"(164)(*), this reconciliation is founded primarily on a negative aim and this unity is based upon a common object of hatred. No matter; Barrès had discovered, and was to rediscover many times over in the years to come (most notably during the Dreyfus Affair), that a powerful source of unity could be found in violent hatred: hatred "nous amène à fournir notre maximum d'énergie dans une direction unique"(**).

But Boulanger also represents something more for Barrès, both now and later: the birth and power of a myth. His first declaration of faith in the General shows him to be genuinely under an illusion concerning the latter's qualities; indeed, the extravagance of his declaration is striking. Boulanger is "un général par qui naissent les grandes espérances", and "depuis Gambetta [...], de tous les hommes qui se sont succédés au pouvoir, le seul clairvoyant". Speaking in the

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(*) Cf. also Mes Cahiers, I, 1896, pp. 59-60, where Barrès attributes the tremendous success of Boulanger in Paris to the rootlessness of the population of the banlieue: "Cette population anarchique aspire à s'unifier [...]. Ils avaient trouvé, ces dépaysés, le moyen de penser d'accord."

(**) The full passage from which this line is taken is worth quoting; Barrès is speaking of the Panama scandal: "La haine n'est pas un bas sentiment. Elle dote de certaines beautés les êtres. Comme elle nous amène à fournir notre maximum d'énergie dans une direction unique [...]. Une vraie haine emporte tout; c'est dans l'âme une reine absolue, devant qui disparaissent tous autres sentiments. Et entre toutes les haines, la plus intense, la plus belle, la reine des reines enfin, c'est celle qu'exhalent les guerres civiles et que j'entrevis, en décembre 1892, aux couloirs du Palais-Bourbon." ('La Haine emporte tout', in Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort, éd. originale, Paris, 1894, pp. 84-85).

As early as 1890 Barrès had also found in the cry "A bas les Juifs" "une des plus belles formules de haine" ('La formule antijuive', Le Figaro, 22 Feb. 1890).

name of "plusieurs milliers de jeunes gens, sensibles et désorientés", he declares this to be "un des tournants les plus graves de ma vie intellectuelle" in which he sees "la possibilité d'apaiser quelques-unes des agitations dont souffrent ceux de mon âge" and to escape from "ce triste isolement,[...] cette sécheresse où nous nous stérilisons"(165). And the epigraph of the article is the famous prayer from Sous l'oeil des Barbares: "O maître, si tu existes quelque part, axiome, religion ou prince des hommes...". Yet such faith could scarcely be sustained after the fiasco of the evening of 27 January 1889 (when Boulanger failed to respond to the pressures of the Paris mob to stage a coup d'Etat), and even before the election campaign is over Barrès' attitude is changing. In August of the same year the name of Boulanger evokes a "patriotique légende"(166). Six months later, surveying the Boulangist movement during the past year, the feature he most emphasizes is the growth of the legend of the General. Following the suicide of the latter at the end of September 1891, Barrès writes:

> L'histoire du parti national est bien terminé; il n'y a plus d'acte à lui ajouter; tout ce qui peut rester d'émotion boulangiste dans le pays s'emploiera à parfaire la légende du général Boulanger. (167)

Whilst two years later, he dreams of writing an Histoire de la popularité du Général Boulanger, in which two chapters especially would appeal to him: "Le premier: Comment naît une légende. Le dernier, à savoir, son suicide..."(168).

The idea seems to be growing in Barrès' mind that, given his constant failure to find new, given values (that is, a goal or direction), it is necessary to 'invent' them (his ambivalence in Le Culte du Moi between the concepts of 'discovery' and 'invention' of new values has already been noted).

Although he continued to hope for the emergence of a great national leader (one has only to think of his evocation in Les Déracinés of Napoleon, "professeur d'énergie"), his attention soon shifted: in the absence of a great leader to unite the nation in a common purpose, why not a great idea - and, if need be, a great myth?

The sources of such a concept are not difficult to find. The growth of 'As if' philosophies towards the end of the nineteenth century is a fact which has already been remarked upon several times. Moreover, the symbolist generation as a whole is much preoccupied with myth and legend in art (a tendency with which Barrès was greatly in sympathy), as well as with various developments of the Platonic or Hegelian 'Idea' (it is noteworthy in this regard that Barrès once wrote à propos of Boulanger: "L'Idée fait son chemin en France"(169)). The idea of the necessity of myth and illusion to human existence was by 1890 a familiar one in France. Barrès' friend Edouard Rod had written in his novel of 1889, Le Sens de la vie, that: "Ceux-là sont les bienfaiteurs de l'humanité qui la trompent"(170). Whilst amongst writers of an older generation, Louis Ménard, and above all Michelet, may well have introduced Barrès to the concept of the necessity of myth to man's existence(*).

Once again, however, the chief source of Barrès' thinking would appear to be Renan, in whose works the concept of the necessity of myth and legend appears at a relatively early stage. Renan had for example written in an essay of 1860 on 'L'Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes':

(*) Ménard's influence is acknowledged explicitly in Le Voyage de Sparte. The name of Michelet recurs with increasing frequency in Barrès' writings from around 1890 onwards.

> Tout préjugé est une erreur, et pourtant l'homme à préjugés est bien supérieur à l'homme nul et sans caractère que notre siècle indifférent a produit. Tout abus est blâmable et cependant la société ne vit que d'abus. Toute affirmation dogmatique renfermée dans une phrase finie est sujette à l'objection, et cependant, le jour où l'humanité cesserait d'affirmer, elle cesserait d'être. [...] Le sage est celui qui voit à la fois que tout est image, préjugé, symbole, et que l'image, le préjugé, le symbole sont nécessaires, utiles et vrais. [...] on peut admettre et aimer un symbole dès que ce symbole a eu sa place dans la conscience de l'humanité. (171)

This line of thought culminates, in Renan's later philosophy, in his tendency to adopt an 'As if' position. While Barrès may equally well have been influenced by a passage such as the following from the preface to L'Avenir de la Science, published in 1890:

> A force de chimères, on avait réussi à obtenir du bon gorille un effort moral surprenant; ôtées les chimères, une partie de l'énergie factice qu'elles éveillaient disparaîtra. (172)

Barrès had expressed an interest in legend in speaking of Renan in Huit jours chez M. Renan; and in an article from the same period he described Renan as one of the founders of a historical school "plus confiante dans la légende que dans les secs renseignements précis", adding: "nous, qui sommes jeunes, nous l'en remercions, et, toutes proportions gardées, nous le suivons joyeusement"(173). It is significant too that in the dialogue between Renan and Chincholle which forms the opening chapter of Le Jardin de Bérénice, Renan's chief interest is in the legend of Boulanger ("comment naît une légende, comment se cristallise une nouvelle âme populaire"(174)) - a conversation of which Barrès says at the beginning of the following chapter that it "m'éclaira brusquement sur mon besoin d'activité et sur les moyens d'y satisfaire"(175).(*)

(*) An important difference, however, exists between the two men. Renan has been concerned with the preservation of 'images'/

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It was above all, therefore, the birth and crystallisation of a myth that Barrès came to see in the saga of Boulanger, a myth which may have been able to provide himself and France with the desired source of unity and sense of direction - "un mythe", as he was later to say of Léopold Baillard in La Colline inspirée (1913), "à sa portée". By the time he came to write Le Roman de l'énergie nationale, the General had been firmly converted in his mind into just such a myth (he even admits that the actual person of Boulanger could have been an embarrassment: "De lui-même il pourrait tout gâter"(176)) - with the implication that politics generally must be based upon such necessary myths:

> Le général que nous louons est une créature de notre esprit, un type. Les types finissent par former les êtres, par s'imprimer sur la réalité. Que du moins les types vivent! Les vieux boulangistes comme moi ont appris à supporter les déceptions et à se nourrir de chimères. (177)

(c) Socialism and anarchism:

Barrès' Boulangism undergoes other transformations also. In the course of 1889, as the hopelessness of the original Boulangist cause became increasingly evident, Barrès - and with him a large part of the Boulangist movement - more and more took up the cause of 'socialism', resolutely proclaiming himself a 'socialist' from February 1889 onwards, and equally resolutely equating Boulangism and socialism(178). After the disasters of the Commune, socialist forces were at last gaining renewed strength in France by the late 1880's, aided by

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/ 'myths', etc., hitherto in force, and the absence of whose hold over the contemporary mind is for him a subject of deep pessimism (although due in large part to his own critical work!). Barrès sees rather the need to create new images and myths to fill the void left by the decline of the old.

the accelerating industrialisation of the country and the creation of an increasingly large urban proletariat. Before the elections of 1893, however, which represented the first real triumph of the socialist parties and obliged them to draw up a definite programme, the term socialism often grouped the most disparate forces; many self-styled socialists had no more clearly-defined programme than a vague call for an improvement in the lot of urban workers and an equally vague call for social 'justice'; whilst these forces of socialism often contained also a strong chauvinistic element, as had the Commune twenty years earlier - whence much of the popular patriotic support for Boulanger. It is against this background that Barrès' socialism must be seen. It is impossible to deny him a measure of native generosity and genuine concern for those he called "les déshérités" and "les classes souffrantes". He wrote following his election, for example, that: "Il est impossible de vivre pendant quelques semaines au milieu des déshérités sans recevoir d'eux une émotion, un sincère mouvement d'amour."(179) And in 1894 Barrès reproached his friends Bourget, Rod and de Vogüé for remaining aloof from "ces rêves de transformation sociale qui s'imposent chaque jour avec plus d'intensité aux jeunes gens de vingt à trente ans"(180). It even seems that Barrès saw for a time in socialism the source of unity and direction both he and France were seeking, comparable to the unifying force of Bonaparte at the beginning of the century and of the humanitarian idealism of 1848(*). Yet for all the truth of Barrès'

(*) Cf. in Toute licence sauf contre l'amour of 1892: "Cette fois-ci c'est le socialisme qui s'organise et semble à la veille d'utiliser les forces considérables qu'il a amassées. Pour un tel départ [...] toutes les énergies s'empressent d'accourir." (éd. originale, p. 62).

charges concerning the domination of financial circles over the government of France (he describes the Opportunist Party at one point as a "Société financière organisée pour l'exploitation de la France sous la Troisième République"(181)), and for all his fulminations against "les classes capitalistes", his real understanding of the processes of capitalism, now as later, is limited. And although he may have voted in the Chamber with the extreme left, his own socialist programme - in 1889, in 1890, and again in 1893 - involves little more than the two objectives of the creation of a retirement pension for workers and the protection of French workers from the competition of foreign workers(182).

Barrès' socialism, in fact, is largely an affair of sentiment, in both a good sense - he defines socialism as simply "l'amour des déshérités"(183) - and a bad sense - it is by no means free of the practices of the 'Culte du Moi'. There remains still an element of exaltation of the 'self', of stimulation of Barrès' own 'sensibility'. What he seeks in political involvement, Barrès tells us in Toute licence sauf contre l'amour, is "la volupté de communier avec les simples"(184). Once again, the practitioner of the 'Culte du Moi' is concerned above all with himself; the end matters less than the means:

> Courons-nous à une désillusion? [...] Question oiseuse à cette place, car notre problème est moins de trouver une solution au socialisme que d'employer l'analyste. (185)(*)

(*) Even Barrès' assertion in this work and elsewhere that the only valid 'law' and basis for a reconstruction of the world is 'love' (whence the curious title Toute licence sauf contre l'amour) is ambiguous: 'love' for Barrès tends to be synonymous with any deeply felt emotion; thus his theories tend to give free rein to all passions.

The ambiguity remains, moreover, when Barrès tells us in Trois Stations de psychothérapie that it is by this same 'love' that one arrives at 'truth' far more effectively than by /

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This tendency is seen most clearly of all in Barrès' review of socialist systems in his 'anarchist' novel of 1893, L'Ennemi des lois. His chief interest is not in their ideas or doctrines as such, nor even in the practical effects of the application of these ideologies to the world (possible improvements in the conditions of life for the masses), but in the ability of these ideas to modify human 'sensibility', and first and foremost his own; he seeks above all else an exaltation, a stimulus of his own sensibility. "Je suis d'accord avec tous ceux qui sentent quelque chose", declares his hero André Maltère. "L'important n'est point les formules, [...] mais d'être un peu échauffé par la vie."(186) And he finally rejects the ideas of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Lassalle, Marx and others because they do not provide the necessary stimulus: "toujours des choses d'intelligence, je n'en suis pas bouleversé... Je voudrais être bouleversé...". The theories of Lassalle and Marx, in particular (or as Barrès likes to call them with heavy irony, of 'scientific socialism', 'German socialism' and 'Jewish socialism'), are merely "sécheresses livresques"; the ideology of the German socialists is cold, "elle ne les échauffe pas"(187). The principle behind such criticisms is clear: neither 'abstract' truth, nor an ability to change material conditions, matter as much as the power of an idea to arouse powerful emotions.

Alongside this sentimental 'socialism', Barrès also puts forward his own variety of 'anarchism'. He was considerably interested in the anarchists of the early 1890's,

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/ observation or consideration of facts (cf. 1891 ed., pp. 3-31). The principle is portentous for Barrès' future intellectual development.

sympathetically studying their theories in a series of articles in La Plume, Le Figaro, Le Courrier de l'Est and Le Journal between 1891 and 1894 (he expressed a great respect for the ideas of Kropotkin, for example(188), though deploring the violence of a Ravachol and an Emile Henry as 'criminal' and useless(189); all the same, it is amusing to note that Barrès himself was considered by some to be 'a dangerous anarchist!). His own version of anarchism involves destruction not by physical violence but by intellectual effort, "une réforme mentale complète". "Un état d'esprit, non des lois, voilà ce que réclame le monde; une réforme mentale plus qu'une réforme matérielle."(190) Nevertheless, the aim is still destruction: the hero of L'Ennemi des lois is "entraîné à détruire tout ce qui est" (191). Indeed, socialism takes on in this context a purely negative, destructive rôle; the various socialist systems "ne valent [...] qu'à jeter bas les constructions précédentes. Ils font une excellente critique des conditions actuelles de la société. Rien de plus. La part de bonheur qu'ils nous donnent, c'est qu'ils nient les principes et violent les droits réputés sacrés."(192) Barrès preaches in this novel the rejection of the whole intellectual heritage of the past, and in particular his own intellectual heritage: the 'Avertissement' of the novel in which occur the following lines is dated October 1892 - the month in which Renan died:

> notre malaise vient exactement de ce que, si différents, nous vivons dans un ordre social imposé par ces morts [i.e. the previous generation], nullement choisi par nous-mêmes. Les morts! ils nous empoisonnent. Ah! quand nous les descendons au caveau, que ne pouvons-nous placer dans leurs bras glacés les dangereux trésors que leurs mains viennent de laisser choir! (193)

But what does Barrès propose to put in the place of this rejected heritage and its values? He makes it quite clear that he offers no new 'doctrines' or 'laws' to replace the old(*); instead, he proposes a Rousseauesque ideal of the free development of the whole personality of every individual. The 'anarchist' hero of L'Ennemi des lois rejects all 'laws' because they impose restrictions upon the laws of his own, spontaneous development; he will be guided solely by this inner law, and by "la pitié et l'amour"(194):

> Vous pensez que les lois [...] mettent dans l'univers plus de chagrins que ne ferait la licence. Et vous donnez au mot loi un sens plus général que celui de code et de système social; vous entendez par là tout principe imposé par le moi général au moi particulier. [...] Vous voulez que chacun apprenne de soi-même sa direction. (195)

In this can be seen the development of the all-important tree image, first introduced in Le Jardin de Bérénice, and which will play a major rôle in the full development of Barrès' nationalist ideology. Yet such a conception rests upon a remarkable optimism concerning social relations: if every individual is left to grow according to his own 'law', his own profound 'instincts', there will be no need for any externally imposed laws or values. Mankind will be like the trees growing harmoniously together in a forest - as Barrès' own image has it. But the result, as many post-Darwinian thinkers were fond of pointing out, can equally well be a jungle, in which trees smother each other in their struggle for survival. The degree of optimism required to hold such a view is great indeed, and Barrès himself was to waver in

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(*) The hero of L'Ennemi des lois declares, for example: "Que mettrez-vous à la place [of existing social forms and values], m'allez-vous dire? Je l'ignore [...] Entraîné à détruire tout ce qui est, je ne vois rien de précis à substituer là." (1893 ed., p. 25). And a few pages later: "Il ajoutait ignorer ce qui se substituerait à l'état des choses." (ibid., p. 36)

his views(*).

L'Ennemi des lois is intellectually a very unsatisfactory work, full of half-worked-out ideas, and it is not surprising that Barrès made few references to it in the course of his later career. The reverse side of the coin to the ideas put forward here can be seen in much of a volume of writings published a year later under the title of Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort. A certain amount of 'literature' enters into this work - the title suggests a literary tradition going back to the heydays of romanticism - but it is interesting in revealing certain of the deeper feelings and thoughts of Barrès. There is still in the work evidence of a concern with the manipulation of 'sensations' ("le véritable caractère de l'humanité [...] est [...] d'ordonner intelligemment ses sensations"(196)), still at times the same confession of a terrible isolation and inability to communicate with others ("Nous sommes murés dans un affreux isolement. Nous ne connaissons guère mieux l'essence de notre maîtresse, de notre ami, que le secret d'un pommier" (197)). It is here, moreover, that Barrès' "decadent' sensibility manifests itself most fully, in his morbid attraction to the dead and the dying, his fascination with decay and destruction, his voluptuous cultivation of melan-

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(*) A similar thesis is put forward in the essay 'Le regard sur la prairie' (dated August 1892), in Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort of 1894. But the work Amori et dolori sacrum of 1903 contains a passage which, though its immediate subject is the composer Wagner, in its terms amounts to an almost explicit rejection of the view of L'Ennemi des lois: Wagner, writes Barrès, at a certain stage of his life, "croyait encore qu'il est quelque part sur la terre un Eldorado et qu'on y atteint par l'amour. Optimisme à peine digne d'un berger de romance! Mais qui de nous n'a point, quelque jour, rêvé que la force d'attraction organiserait naturellement le bonheur, dès l'instant que l'on abolirait les lois?" (Orig. ed., 1903, p, 98. My italics.)

choly(198), all as a means of self-stimulation. And this 'decadent' sensibility contains too an element of would-be self-destruction, reminiscent of the "excitation nerveuse à se détruire" of the hero of L'Ennemi des lois(199). Here, too, in Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort, Barrès contradicts his earlier expressions of faith in the 'wisdom' of 'the people'; he expresses an ironical contempt for the concepts of "la'justice immanente' de l'histoire et la 'clairvoyance de l'opinion'"(200). A final feature worth noting is the remarkable number of times in this volume in which the term "préjugés" occurs, in reference to the values of the world around him; yet the tendency is growing towards an acceptance of these 'prejudices', through a denigration of 'thought'. The way to the future is clear in the exhortation:

> sortons du sépulcre, revêtons nos préjugés. Si temporaires, du moins ils nous tiennent chaud. Recommençons à ne plus penser. (201)

(vii) Barrès' nationalist doctrine and its ambiguities.

We have seen some of the roots of Barrès' nationalist ideology in his thought before 1894(*). The crystallisation of his ideas continues during the political campaign which he and his friends waged in La Cocarde in 1894-95, and above all during and immediately after the Dreyfus Affair and the death of his parents (his father died in 1898, his mother in 1901). Its best expression is to be found in Scènes et doctrines

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(*) The term 'nationalism' appears to have been coined, or at least given its current meaning, by Barrès himself. Cf. his article 'La Querelle des nationalistes et des cosmopolites', Le Figaro, 4 July 1892.

du nationalisme, an edited collection of Barrès' journalistic writings of the previous few years published in 1902. A detailed exposition of Barrès' doctrines - in particular, of his social and political ideas - would be out of place here; nevertheless a few comments concerning his psychological and metaphysical doctrines which theoretically justify the latter, are relevant. These comments apply, broadly speaking, to Barrès' nationalism up to 1914; with the outbreak of war, and especially after the war, his outlook undergoes certain changes.

Barrès, along with many others of his time, saw a centuries-long tradition of rationalism as having led to the undermining and destruction of all values and ideals, of all absolutes; 'reason' appeared as an inevitable source of nihilism. At the same time, he had discovered that "la pensée, l'usage de la raison isolent"(202). Any attempt, therefore, both to construct new values, a new absolute, and to achieve an (imagined) reintegration in a community, a sense of 'belonging' and of purpose in this community, must begin with an abandonment of trust in 'reason' and the critical intellect. The writings of Barrès throughout the 1890's are increasingly marked by an attack on the powers of reason and the intellect, and a corresponding exaltation of the powers of 'feeling'. In words which he was fond of repeating time and time again:

> L'émotivité, c'est la grande qualité humaine; profondément nous sommes des êtres affectifs; l'intelligence, quelle très petite chose à la surface de nous-mêmes. (203)

He denies moreover not merely the competence of reason, but the very existence of an independent 'reason' and 'intellect' in man, and even of an independent, individual self. There

remains only "la collectivité". Our very ideas are but physiological reactions, determined by our ancestry and the milieu in which we live; there can therefore be no such thing as an absolute 'truth', or for that matter 'justice' - whence Barrès' violent attacks upon the 'intellectuals' of the Dreyfus Affair, those "logiciens de l'absolu"(204). The previous generation, claims Barrès, - Hugo, Michelet, Taine and Renan -

> croyaient à une raison indépendante, existant en chacun de nous et qui nous permet d'approcher la vérité. L'individu, son intelligence, sa faculté de saisir les lois de l'univers! Il faut en rabattre. Nous ne sommes pas les maîtres des pensées qui naissent en nous. Elles sont des façons de réagir où se traduisent de très anciennes dispositions physiologiques. [...] Il n'y a pas d'idées personnelles; les idées même les plus abstraites [...] sont des façons de sentir générales et apparaissent nécessairement chez tous les êtres de même organisme assiégés par les mêmes images. [...] nous sommes le prolongement et la continuité de nos pères et mères. (*)

This idea, and even these very words, Barrès, as was his wont, repeats time and time again in his writings of these years(205). This physiological determinism lies at the basis of his nationalism; in the celebrated definition: "Un nationaliste,

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(*) The argument is carried even further in Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, where 'truth' is defined in the following terms: "QU'EST-CE QUE LA VÉRITÉ? - Ce n'est point des choses à savoir, c'est de trouver un certain point, un point unique, celui-là, nul autre, d'où toutes choses nous apparaissent avec des proportions vraies [sic]." Thus there is "[une] vérité et [une] justice françaises", in opposition to other 'truths' and 'justices', and even "[une] raison française"! (Ed. orig., 1902, pp. 12, 13). The uses to which this doctrine was to be put during the Dreyfus Affair are not hard to see. Dreyfus, as a Jew and a foreigner, determined by other influences from those which mould a Frenchman, could not but be a 'traitor'. Thus, too, a man like Zola, with his admixture of Italian blood, could not possibly think in the same manner as a true, pure-blooded Frenchman.

On the subject of an absolute of justice, it is worth noting also the declaration in Barrès' novel Les Amitiés françaises: "Il est dégradant de répéter qu'une chose doit être simplement parce qu'elle est juste." (Ed. orig., 1903, p. 16.)

c'est un Français qui a pris conscience de sa formation. Nationalisme est acceptation d'un déterminisme."(206)

Such an 'acceptance', it is clear, is the exact opposite of the aim of the 'homme libre' to be completely undetermined. Whether one accepts Gide's description of Barrès, Maurras and their peers as "les ratés de l'individualisme" or not, Barrès had indeed come a long way. Perhaps a clue to this evolution is to be found in the admission in La Mort de Venise that "l'acceptation d'une discipline est moins dure, au demeurant, que l'entière liberté"(207). Whilst in 'Le 2 novembre en Lorraine', Barrès speaks of the need to "accepter nos esclavages" in order to "nous sauver d'une stérile anarchie"; in this 'slavery', "une magnifique douceur nous apaise"(208). Barrès may well be guilty of the 'philosophical suicide' of Camus, "ce jeu mortel qui mène de la lucidité en face de l'existence à l'évasion hors de la lumière"(209).

This is not, however, to deny any philosophical basis to Barrès' doctrines. The chief sources of these are Taine, and above all the philosopher and friend of Barrès Jules Soury, who taught a kind of physiological materialism(*). From Taine came the concept of the importance of organic growth, incarnated for Barrès in the symbol of the tree (this symbol, and the principle of 'association', are the two

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(*) Barrès made the acquaintance of Soury within a few months of his arrival in Paris in 1883. He attended Soury's lectures on physiology from 1893 to 1896, and in particular his lectures on the physiology of the central nervous system in 1896, at the time of writing Les Déracinés. The first of his Cahiers contains numerous references to Soury and to his ideas: cf. pp. 64-74, 76-82, 83-92.

Soury's chief works are: Bréviaire de l'histoire du matérialisme (1881), Philosophie naturelle (1882), and Campagne nationaliste, 1894-1901 (1902).

chief ideas which the young Roemerspracher learns from Taine in Les Déracinés). From Taine also Barrès takes over a rigid determinism, both psychological and physiological. The latter's formula of historical determinism - a civilisation is determined by the three factors of race, milieu and moment - is adopted by Barrès, milieu being rebaptized "la terre" and race "les morts", to give the doctrine of "la terre et les morts". Barrès' doctrine of the 'collectivity' in which the individual has his roots and by which he is totally determined appears to owe something to Taine also; whilst his 'decomposition' of the 'self' - in such marked contrast to the view expressed at the time of Le Culte du Moi - is also similar to that of Taine in De l'intelligence (1870). As for Soury, the latter taught that our ideas are imposed "par le milieu où nous sommes plongés et les images qui nous assiègent"; that "ascendants et descendants ne font qu'un même être, en vertu d'une continuité d'ordre anatomique"; and, like Barrès after him, indulged in something of an ancestor-cult: "Une seule chose importe à l'individu [...] la tradition des ancêtres"(210).(*) Similar ideas, moreover,

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(*) One can trace the formation of Barrès' conceptions from 1896 onwards in his Cahiers. A notation in Cahier I (p. 154) reveals the influence of Soury: "Ce qui est transmis héréditairement, c'est la structure des centres nerveux. Plongés dans un même milieu, nous devons réagir de même façon." It seems also that the phrase of which Barrès was so fond - "l'intelligence, quelle très petite chose à la surface de nous-mêmes [...] pfofondément nous sommes des êtres affectifs" - comes originally from Soury; cf. Cahier I, p. 73.

Significant in the above-quoted words of Soury is the term 'images': this idea is linked in Barrès' mind with the concepts of 'myth' and 'legend' discussed earlier, and plays an important rôle in his later conception of life: 'images' are opposed to abstract 'ideas' and 'truths' in the power they exercise over the mind of the individual - an element of Barrès' general anti-intellectualism. It is worth noting in this context that the sub-title of Barrès' novel-cum-manual on child-rearing, Les Amitiés françaises, was originally to have been: 'Notes sur l'acquisition par un petit Lorrain des images qui donnent un prix à la vie.'

- that the past lives on in each individual, that 'universal' values and truths are non-existent and non-sensical and that outside of the truths and values of his ancestors the individual is lost - are to be found in a number of traditionalist historians, most notable amongst them Fustel de Coulanges. Whilst Barrès' own particular brand of irrationalism or anti-intellectualism is merely a variation upon a widespread theme in these years.

In his nationalist ideology Barrès finds also a new 'goal' to which he will devote his life: that of 'la Revanche'. This is the 'discipline' and the 'duty' imposed upon him by his long line of ancestors, the 'direction' he receives from them. The function in history of Lorraine has always been to provide "les régiments de fer que la France oppose à la Germanie"; and Barrès claims to find in this "mon poste véritable, le but de mes efforts, ma prédestination"(211). As he puts it in that exasperatingly nationalistic manual on the bringing up of a child to be a good French patriot (that is, to hate the Germans and long to revenge the defeat of 1870), Les Amitiés françaises: "sa raison de vivre, c'est la Revanche"(212). (The work is subtitled: 'Notes sur l'acquisition par un petit Lorrain des sentiments qui donnent un prix à la vie'.) This is also the goal in which he sees the salvation of the nation as a whole, the longed-for source of unity and direction. By such means is war prepared.

Yet in this, something remains of the ambiguity noted earlier. There was nothing spontaneous in Barrès' claimed recognition of his spiritual roots in Lorraine, in his sense of 'enracinement' in his native province. Indeed, he seems to have hesitated for some time between the two sources of

his heredity, Lorraine and Auvergne - according his preferences to the former only after the death of his parents (and particularly of his mother in 1901, which came as a tremendous emotional shock to Barrès) and their burial at Charmes. The Cahiers contain the interesting confession, speaking of Lorraine: "Au début je ne l'aimai pas. Elle commença de me plaire quand je pensai qu'elle avait ses morts." One is led to suspect that this 'discovery' of his spiritual roots in Lorraine is to a considerable extent the result of a deliberate choice(*). And in moments of confession, or by the odd word here and there, Barrès does indeed at times suggest this. "Ma Lorraine, force, fécondité d'une belle image que nous nous formons de nous-mêmes", he noted in his Cahiers(213). And elsewhere:

> Mes rapports avec la Lorraine sont d'un mariage, je la crée et je me crée.
> Je n'ai pas cessé de cultiver, d'inventer, de créer en moi cette Lorraine intérieure [...]. (214)
>
> Qu'importe si cette Lorraine éternelle est un fantôme créé par notre conscience poétique. (215)
>
> Souvent j'ai senti jusqu'à la misère le peu de réalité historique de ma Lorraine et qu'elle était un Eldorado de ma pensée. (216)

And in his 1904 Preface to Un Homme libre there is the statement: "Je me place dans une collectivité un peu plus longue que mon individu; je m'invente une destination un peu plus raisonnable que ma chétive carrière."(217) Whilst in Les Amitiés françaises, Barrès admits the necessity, "puisqu'il s'agit de vivre, c'est-à-dire de nous accommoder avec les circonstances", to create values "par un acte réfléchi de notre volonté"(218). Finally, at times, in the intimacy of

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(*) To some extent, of course, we all have our spiritual roots in our place of birth and upbringing. But Barrès raises this common-sense observation to the plane of metaphysical reality.

his Cahiers, Barrès reveals an awareness that he is playing a rôle (although one which he is determined not to give up). The temptation is strong indeed to agree with the assertion of his fellow-Lorrainer Henri Franck: "Ce n'est pas la Lorraine qui a créé Barrès, c'est Barrès qui a créé la Lorraine."(219)

Moreover, Barrès seems to have retreated from certain of the implications of his earlier doctrine of the Unconscious, borrowed from Hartmann. For the latter, the Unconscious is a kind of divine Providence, supremely wise, controlling the evolution of the universe towards a fixed goal (Hartmann has in fact reintroduced God through the back door). And Barrès too in Le Jardin de Bérénice had in his enthusiasm been led to speak of "la volonté de l'inconscient", of its "sagesse", and even of its 'omniscience' and 'omnipotence'(220). In his mature nationalist doctrine, however, Barrès' absolute is considerably less than a guiding Providence. Indeed, the 'salvation' he has found in no way abolishes his earlier metaphysical nihilism, the concept of an 'absurd' universe. In his 'discours' of 1898 on Leconte de Lisle, for example, Barrès declares that the latter has

> formulé avec netteté les conclusions désespérantes où nous amène l'enquête scientifique sur le développement des civilisations [...]. L'oeuvre de Leconte de Lisle nie la Providence, la loi du Progrès et les revanches du Droit. (221)

The poet's work expresses the "tragique nihilisme", the sense of "la vanité de l'effort" and the belief that "la vie manque de but" which derive from a study of history. Barrès' own conclusions are identical with those of Leconte de Lisle:

> J'ignore si nos petits-fils retrouveront quelque sens dans l'histoire, comme faisaient les Bossuet, les Condorcet, ou ce politique [Proudhon or a disciple of Proudhon?] qui crut pouvoir parler de justice immanente. Aujourd'hui nous n'y découvrons nul chemin tracé [...].

Nowhere can he discern "la moindre trace d'un programme, ni d'une marche en avant"(222). His conclusions in the 1904 Preface to Un Homme libre are the same:

> Au milieu d'un océan et d'un sombre mystère de vagues qui me pressent, je me tiens à ma conception historique, comme un naufragé à sa barque. Je ne touche pas à l'énigme du commencement des choses, ni à la douloureuse énigme de la fin de toutes choses. Je me cramponne à ma courte solidité. (223)

Whilst some years later again, in Le Voyage de Sparte, Barrès again confesses: "Il est trop certain que la vie n'a pas de but."(224) Moreover, the relativism ("la réalité varie avec chacun de nous") and individualism of the thought of the young Barrès are carried over into his nationalist doctrine: every individual must find his own 'direction' and 'goal' imposed upon him by his ancestors:

> Je défends mon cimetière. J'ai abandonné toutes les autres positions: religion, certitude scientifique, sens de la vie, progrès... Je me réfugie chez mes morts; j'ai une foi et un devoir, mais ils sont ma foi et mon devoir. (225)

Barrès' admission of 'absurdity' is at times coupled with a complete ethical relativism deriving from it(*).

(*) This is so at times in a sense which has nothing to do with 'directions' received from one's heredity. In his essay on the friend of his youth, Stanislas de Guaita, for example, Barrès declares that the latter found his own way out of the common nihilistic impasse of their youth by the "porte magnifique et singulière" of occultism; or, as he also puts it, Guaita "trouva dans l'antique sentier des mages les matériaux pour se dresser un abri à sa mesure et selon ses besoins" (Stanislas de Guaita, 1898, pp. 16-17. My italics. In Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, pp. 128-140.). The implication is that any form of existence, any belief, which provides a 'shelter' or an 'escape' from this nihilism is valid. But such a position is just as much an admission of ethical bankruptcy as Renan's statement, in his essay on Amiel, much meditated by Barrès, quoted earlier: "Le moyen de salut n'est pas le même pour tous. Pour l'un, c'est la vertu; pour l'autre, l'ardeur du vrai [...] l'amour de l'art [...] la curiosité, l'ambition, les voyages, le luxe, les femmes, la richesse [...] la morphine et l'alcool." (Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, Calmann-Lévy, II, p. 1153.)

Finally, Barrès is never able to put behind him completely the nihilistic consciousness of his youth, the sense of the pointlessness of all activity, of the illusory nature of all goals men set before themselves, including his own - "le bâillement universel, l'aveu d'impuissance, l'"à quoi bon?" qui fait le dernier mot de toutes les activités"(226).(*) "Entrevu un nouveau cercle dans cet enfer de nihilisme", he notes on one occasion in his Cahiers(227). Whilst in Les Amitiés françaises Barrès frankly admits that all values and all goals are 'illusions'(228); and in the final pages of the novel, in the midst of his supposed 'Chant de confiance dans la vie', Barrès wrote the following lines which he later declared to constitute the 'best definition' of his character:

> La vie n'a pas de sens. Je crois même que chaque jour elle devient plus absurde. Se soumettre à toutes les illusions et les connaître très nettement comme illusions, voilà notre rôle. Toujours désirer et savoir que notre désir, que tout nourrit, ne s'apaise de rien! [...] De quelque point qu'on les considère, l'univers et notre existence sont des tumultes insensés... (229)

(viii) Conclusion.

Albert Béguin, in L'Âme romantique et le rêve, has some interesting pages on myths "qui tendent à ôter la créature de sa solitude pour la réintégrer dans l'ensemble des choses"(230). The description applies perfectly to the psychological processes of both Barrès and Laforgue. Both men, as both intellectuals and artists, have a fundamental concern not only with abstract ideas, but also with images - images of them-

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(*) Cf. also Les Amitiés françaises, where Barrès declares that he has "subi comme d'autres, et plus peut-être, ce flot de nihilisme", and admits the impossibility of ever detaching himself completely from such influences (éd. orig., 1903, pp. 258, 262).

selves and of the world. And both men attempt, first in adapting Hartmann's conception of the Unconscious, and then, for Barrès, in the elaboration of the doctrine of 'enracinement' and of the idea of Lorraine, to find or to create an image of the world in which they themselves will be seen as firmly 'integrated' - in order to escape from the obsession of an earlier image of themselves as an isolated, thinking individual in an 'absurd' universe. Of the two, Barrès was ultimately the more successful in this quest; yet deep cracks remained even in the edifice he had constructed for himself. His nationalism represents an attempt to entrench himself in an absolute; but the nation is not an absolute, it is a relative, historical product, constantly evolving; for all his attacks on 'intellectuals', Barrès himself was sufficient of an intellectual to be aware of the shakiness of his own postulates.

Béguin also sees romanticism and symbolism together as moments of history in which there is a reaction against a hitherto dominant rationalism , and in which an appeal is made to the imagination to invent new myths. Barrès too sees contemporary France as suffering from the destructive effects of a critical rationalism, setting about to attempt to reverse the tendencies of recent history by a systematic onslaught on that same rationalism - and ultimately by an attempt to create new myths which will provide new goals or values in place of those that have been destroyed. We have been concerned in this chapter with the private, intimate side of Barrès' thought; his public face is of course very different. But the one is related to the other, and many of the

publicly proclaimed doctrines and political activities of the mature Barrès represent an attempt to resolve the intellectual dilemma of his early years. The preoccupation of these years is to find some purpose or ideal which will channel his energy and resources into a single direction, which will provide a source of unity; and he projects this personal dilemma onto an image of France as a whole: it too is lacking in unity, lacking in a single unifying purpose. The enemy is declared to be the politicians who divide the country and attempt to impose upon it false 'universal' and 'absolute' values; the single, unifying purpose is found in the desire for reconquest of the lost territories of Alsace-Lorraine. This is the essence of Barrès' course from nihilism to nationalism.

Barrès' world-view is essentially static and rural, in a world whose chief characteristic is an increasingly rapid change in the direction of industrialisation and urbanisation. His conception of an ideal France represents a wish to go back in history beyond the advent of the industrial revolution (and also, ultimately, beyond the domination of the values of bourgeois capitalism) to the values of an idealised, patrician feudalism. Such a turning back of history was of course impossible. Yet although he saw and splendidly described the break-up of a traditional social fabric, along with the vast majority of his contemporaries he failed to understand the economic processes which lay behind this phenomenon: the industrial and technological revolution and the machinery of capitalism which, more than anything else, were responsible for the disunity Barrès believed he saw in France, for the 'atomisation' of society

and for the 'déracinement' of millions of Frenchmen. In thus failing to grasp the social and economic roots of the disease which he saw, Barrès also failed to envisage the possibility of another solution - that of socialism - which, through an acceptance of industrialism, placed now at the service of the nation or community as a whole, might also have constituted the desired source of unity of purpose and effort.

Chapter IX: REFERENCES.

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(5) Introduction to Trois Stations de psychothérapie, Perrin, 1891, p. xvi.

(6) Trois Stations de psychothérapie, 1891, p. 66.

(7) Les Taches d'encre, No. 1, Nov. 1884, p. 62.

(8) Cit. Pierre MOREAU, Maurice Barrès, Paris, 1946, pp. 52-53.

(9) 'Chronique de Paris', in Les Chroniques, 1 June 1887. Cf. also Mes Mémoires, in Mes Cahiers, I, Plon, 1929.

(10) Mes Mémoires, in Mes Cahiers, I, p. 20.

(11) Sous l'oeil des Barbares, Plon, 1922, p. 276. Cf. also Pierre CAMPAUX, 'Souvenirs de l'enfance de Maurice Barrès', Revue hebdomadaire, 8 Jan, 1927, pp. 200-208.

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(13) Preface to the 1904 edition of Un Homme libre; éd. définitive, Plon, 1922, p. xiv.

(14) Le Roman de l'énergie nationale, tome I: Les Déracinés, éd. orig., Charpentier-Fasquelle, 1897, pp. 11, 37, 39.

(15) ibid., pp. 21 f., 116.

(16) ibid., pp. 2-3, 14. The image "le monde n'est qu'une cire..." is borrowed from Bourget's Essais de psychologie contemporaine, 1883.

(17) ibid., pp. 25, 15.

(18) Mes Cahiers, I, p. 216.

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(20) Cit. Maurice DAVANTURE, 'Barrès, Burdeau et Bouteiller', Maurice Barrès. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nancy, 1963. Annales de l'Est, No. 24, p. 36. The source is of course not indicated.

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(22) Les Déracinés, 1897, p. 11.

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(24) Cf. Trois Stations de psychothérapie, 1891, p. 48.

(25) Un Rénovateur de l'occultisme, Stanislas de Guaita. In Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, pp. 126, 129.

(26) ibid., p. 134.

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(28) La Grande Pitié des Eglises de France, Emile-Paul, 1914, p. 170.

(29) Victor Giraud, ed., Taine et Renan. Pages perdues. [Essays of Barrès] Paris, Editions Bossard, 1922, Introduction, p. 9. Cf. also P.-H. PETITBON, Taine, Renan, Barrès. Etude d'influence, Paris, 1935.

(30) GIRAUD, op. cit., pp. 10-11, and PETITBON, op. cit.

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(32) 'Le Centenaire d'Ernest Renan' [address delivered at the Sorbonne in 1923 for the centenary of Renan's birth], Les Maîtres, pp. 298-299.

(33) Preface to the 1904 (Sansot) edition of Huit jours chez M. Renan.

(34) 'Le Centenaire d'Ernest Renan', Les Maîtres, pp. 297-298.

(35) Recounted in La Grande Pitié des Eglises de France, pp. 257-258. Cf. also PETITBON, op. cit., p. 27, and Jean DIETZ, 'Les Débuts de Maurice Barrès, 1883-1888', Revue de Paris, 1 Oct. 1928, pp. 616-626.

(36) Charles LE GOFFIC, L'Ame bretonne. Cited in the 'Notice' to the Pauvert (1965) edition of Huit jours chez M. Renan, p. 102. These comments may need to be read in the light of the later Catholic and monarchist convictions of Le Goffic.

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(38) This was confirmed by Barrès to Charles Maurras. Cf. MAURRAS, essay on Barrès in Maîtres et témoins de ma vie d'esprit, Paris, Flammarion, 1953, p. 20.

(39) Cf. 'Anatole France', La Jeune France, 1 Feb. 1883. Also published as a brochure: Anatole France, "Les Hommes de la Jeune France", No. XIV, Paris, Charavay frères, 1883.

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(45) Cf. 'Lettre à M. Berthelot', Journal des Débats, 1 Jan. 1887. Reprinted in Feuilles détachées, Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Psichari, Calmann-Lévy, II, pp.1036-1043.

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(47) ibid., p. 22. Barrès' italics.

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(50) Cf. Barbares, chapter 1, in particular pp. 85-86.

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(61) Jean MORÉAS, Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui. Maurice Barrès, Paris, Lemerre, s.d.

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(63) Cit. R. JACQUET, Notre Maître Maurice Barrès, p. 257.

(64) Les Taches d'encre, No. 2, Dec, 1884, p. 41.

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(70) ibid., p. 20.

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(75) ibid.

(76) Trois Stations de psychothérapie, 1891, p. 66.

(77) 'Chronique parisienne', La Vie Moderne, 22 Aug. 1885.

(78) Revue contemporaine, 23 Aug. 1885.

(79) 'La Folie de Charles Baudelaire', Les Taches d'encre, No. 1, Nov. 1884. Cf. also Barrès' article 'Maurice Rollinat', La Jeune France, March 1883, p. 673.

(80) Les Taches d'encre, No. 2, Dec. 1884, p. 41.

(81) Examen des trois romans idéologiques (1892), In Sous l'oeil des Barbares, Plon, 1922, pp. 10-11. Cf. also ibid., p. 24.

(82) Examen des trois romans idéologiques, in Barbares, pp. 10, 12, 14.

(83) ibid., p. 15.

(84) ibid., p. 17.

(85) Cit. DUHOURCAU, La Voix intérieure de Maurice Barrès d'après ses Cahiers. The source is not indicated.

(86) Barbares, p. 198.

(87) ibid., p. 216.

(88) Un Homme libre, éd. définitive, Plon, 1922, p. 91.

(89) ibid., 'Dédicace', p. xviii.

(90) Barbares, p. 260.

(91) Preface to Maurice BEAUBOURG, Contes pour les assassins.

(92) Article in Le Journal, 10 Aug. 1894.

(93) Un Homme libre, 'Dédicace', p. xix.

(94) Un Homme libre, p. 4.

(95) ibid., p. 22.

(96) ibid., p. 13.

(97) ibid., p. 10.

(98) Barbares, p. 84.

(99) ibid., pp. 179-180.

(100) ibid., pp. 181, 182, 191.

(101) Examen des trois romans idéologiques, in Barbares, p. 19.

(102) Cf. in particular Barbares, pp. 236-237.

(103) Examen des trois romans idéologiques, in Barbares, pp. 20, 21.

(104) ibid., p. 23.

(105) Barbares, p. 216.

(106) ibid., pp. 236-237. My italics.

(107) Examen, in Barbares, p. 21.

(108) Un Homme libre, p. 13.

(109) ibid., p. 21.

(110) MAURRAS, Maîtres et témoins de ma vie d'esprit, Flammarion, 1953, p. 62 (chapter on Barrès dated 1894).

(111) Un Homme libre, pp. 229-230.

(112) Ibid., p. 62.

(113) Cf. Preface to Sous l'oeil des Barbares, p. 59; and p. 88 of the same novel.

(114) Barbares, p. 239.

(115) Cf. Mes Cahiers, I, p. 246.

(116) Cf. Barbares, pp. 239-240.

(117) ibid., pp. 240-241.

(118) Les Taches d'encre, No. 2, Dec. 1884, p. 41.

(119) Examen, in Barbares, p. 40.

(120) Barbares, p. 178.

(121) Preface to 1904 edition of Un Homme libre. Ed. déf., Plon, 1922, pp. vii-viii, xv.

(122) Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort (1894), éd. déf., Plon, 1921, p. 110. Pages dated 1892.

(123) Examen, in Barbares, p. 28.

(124) ibid, p. 30.

(125) 'Pas de veau gras! (Réponse à M. René Doumic)', Le Journal, 8 Feb. 1900. Published as appendix to Un Homme libre, 1922, pp. 243-244.

(126) ibid., pp. 244-246.

(127) Un Homme libre, pp. 129-130.

(128) ibid,, pp. 129, 148.

(129) ibid., p. 121.

(130) ibid., p. 65.

(131) ibid., pp. 164, 165. Barrès' italics (first phrase) and mine.

(132) Examen, in Barbares, pp. 46-47.

(133) Un Homme libre, pp. 178-179.

(134) ibid,, p. 230.

(135) Examen, in Barbares, pp. 32-33.

(136) Un Homme libre, p. 204.

(137) ibid., pp. 235-236.

(138) Barbares, p. 230.

(139) Un Homme libre, pp. 239-240.

(140) Le Jardin de Bérénice, p. 120.

(141) Examen, in Barbares, pp. 38-39.

(142) ibid., p. 41.

(143) Un Homme libre, p. 63. The text of the original edition is slightly different, but not substantially so.

(144) Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, éd. orig., 1902, p. 8.

(145) Preface to 1904 edition of Un Homme libre. Ed. déf., Plon, 1922, pp. x-xi, xiii-xiv.

(146) Barbares, p. 279.

(147) ibid., p. 277.

(148) ibid., p. 273.

(149) Examen, in Barbares, p. 42.

(150) Toute licence sauf contre l'amour, éd. orig., 1892, p. 60.

(150A) ibid., pp. 38, 61.

(151) Barbares, p. 260.

(152) Un Homme libre, p. 5.

(153) Le Jardin de Bérénice, p. 120.

(154) Mes Mémoires, in Mes Cahiers, I(1896-98), p. 37.

(155) Cit. François DUHOURCAU, La Voix intérieure de Maurice Barrès d'après ses Cahiers, p. 94. The exact source is not indicated.

(156) Mes Cahiers, I, p. 39.

(157) Barbares, p. 249. Un Homme libre, p. 6.

(158) 'M. le Général Boulanger et la nouvelle génération', La Revue Indépendante, April 1888, tome VII, No. 18, pp. 55-63.

(159) Cf. Revue Indépendante, April 1888; and Courrier de l'Est, 19 Jan. 1889 ('Aux parlementaires du Quartier latin'); 24 Jan. 1889; 25 Jan. 1889; 26 Jan. 1889 ('Les Travailleurs décideront'); 7 Feb. 1889; 1 March 1889; 26 May 1889.

(160) Cf. Courrier de l'Est, 28 Feb. 1889 ('Le Programme du Parti national boulangiste'); and 1, 2, 6 March 1889, 26 May 1889.

(161) Courrier de l'Est, 7 Feb. 1889.

(162) Cf. Le Jardin de Bérénice, and the article 'Aux parlementaires du Quartier latin', Courrier de l'Est, 19 Jan. 1889.

(163) La Revue Indépendante, April 1888. Cf. also the article 'Les Enseignements d'une année de boulangisme', Le Figaro, 2 Feb. 1890, and La Presse, 5 Feb. 1890, where Barrès refers to the Boulangist party as "un être collectif".

(164) Cf. Courrier de l'Est, 7 Feb. 1889, and the article 'Les Enseignements d'une année de boulangisme', Le Figaro, 2 Feb. 1890.

(165) 'M. le Général Boulanger et la nouvelle génération', Revue Indépendante, April 1888, pp. 55-63.

(166) La Presse, 8 Aug. 1889.

(167) 'Impressions de rentrée', Le Figaro, 16 Oct. 1891.

(168) Le Journal, 19 May 1893.

(169) Revue Indépendante, April 1888.

(170) Edouard ROD, Le Sens de la vie, Paris, 1889, p. 297.

(171) 'L'Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes' (1860), in Questions contemporaines (1868). Oeuvres complètes, I, pp. 278-279. My italics.

(172) Oeuvres complètes, III, p. 726.

(173) 'Une Journée à Avignon', Le Voltaire, 22 March 1888.

(174) Le Jardin de Bérénice, pp. 7, 13.

(175) ibid., p. 15.

(176) L'Appel au soldat, éd. déf., Plon, tome I, p. 93.

(177) ibid., pp. 261-262.

(178) Cf. Courrier de l'Est, 2 Feb. 1890, and 'Les Enseignements d'une année de boulangisme', Le Figaro, 2 Feb. 1890.

(179) 'Notes d'un nouvel élu', La Presse, 31 Oct. 1889.

(180) Le Figaro, 1 June 1894.
(181) Courrier de l'Est, 1 Feb. 1889, 26 May 1889.
(182) Cf. Courrier de l'Est, 6 Oct. 1889; 'Petit questionnaire sur la situation des ouvriers', ibid., 27 April 1890; and the brochure Contre les étrangers: étude pour la protection des ouvriers français, Paris, 1893.

(183) 'Les Enseignements d'une année de Boulangisme', Le Figaro, 2 Feb. 1890.

(184) Toute licence sauf contre l'amour, 1892, p. 80.

(185) ibid., p. 62.

(186) L'Ennemi des lois, Paris, 1893. Cf. 'Avertissement provisoire', and pp. 163-164, 170-171, 42.

(187) ibid., pp. 243; 163, 164, 165, 182, 179, 171.

(188) Cf. 'Lettre sur l'anarchie', La Plume, 1 Sept. 1892.

(189) Cf. 'Anarchistes', Courrier de l'Est, 2 April 1892, and chapter 1 of L'Ennemi des lois.

(190) L'Ennemi des lois, 1893, pp. 196, 230.

(191) ibid., p. 25.

(192) ibid., p. 228.

(193) ibid., p. 5.

(194) ibid., p. 232.

(195) ibid., pp. 274-275.

(196) Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort, éd. orig., 1894, p. 282; éd. déf., Plon, 1921, p. 268. Lines dated November 1892.

(197) ibid., 1894, p. 300; éd. déf. (with slight modifications), p. 282.

(198) Cf. ibid., 1894, pp. 137, 293; éd. déf., pp. 294.

(199) L'Ennemi des lois, p. 109.

(200) Cf. Du Sang, de la volupté et de la mort, 1894, p. 315. Pages dated September 1893.

(201) ibid., 1894, p. 226; éd. déf., p. 225. The latter adds the final revealing line: "Fermons notre coeur sur la vérité."

(202) Toute licence sauf contre l'amour, 1892, p. 57.

(203) Un Rénovateur de l'occultisme, Stanislas de Guaita, 1898. Lines omitted from the text of this essay in Amori et dolori sacrum (1903), but repeated, sometimes in slightly modified form, in:
Mes Cahiers, I, p. 73.
Les Déracinés, 1897, p. 319.
Leurs figures, éd. déf., Plon, p. 280.
L'Appel au soldat, éd. déf., Plon, p. vi.

(204) Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, éd. orig., 1902, Livre Deuxième, Chapitre II: 'Les Intellectuels ou logiciens de l'absolu'.

(205) The passage is quoted from Barrès' article 'Pas de veau gras! (Réponse à M. René Doumic)', Le Journal, 8 Feb. 1900, published as an appendix to Un Homme libre, Plon, 1922, pp. 243 ff. The same article is reprinted in full, with minor modifications, in Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, 1902, pp. 13 ff. The passage quoted is repeated almost word for word in an article of Nov. 1902, 'Le 2 novembre en Lorraine', reprinted in Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, pp. 276-277; whilst part of it is already to be found in Un Rénovateur de l'occultisme. Stanislas de Guaita, 1898, reprinted in Amori, 1903, p. 132.

(206) Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme, p. 10.

(207) La Mort de Venise, in Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, p.77.

(208) In Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, pp. 274, 277.

(209) Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Gallimard, p. 17.

(210) Cit. P. A. OUSTON, Imagination in the Philosophy and Rhetoric of Maurice Barrès' Political and Religious Traditionalism, London University Ph.D. thesis, 1964, pp. 272, 222, 223.

(211) 'Le 2 novembre en Lorraine', Amori et dolori sacrum, 1903, pp. 290, 291.

(212) Les Amitiés françaises, Paris, 1903, p. 92. The words are spoken of Barrès' son Philippe, but apply equally to himself.

(213) Mes Cahiers, IX, p. 98.

(214) Mes Mémoires, in Mes Cahiers, I, pp. 46-47. Barrès' italics.

(215) Preface to L. MADELIN, Croquis lorrains, Paris, 1907. Cit. OUSTON, Imagination in the Philosophy and Rhetoric of Maurice Barrès' Political and Religious Traditionalism.

(216) Mes Cahiers, VI, p. 302.

(217) In Un Homme libre, 1922, p. xv. My italics.

(218) Les Amitiés françaises, p. 251.

(219) Cit. Pierre MOREAU, Maurice Barrès, p. 14.

(220) Le Jardin de Bérénice, pp. 186, 144, 123.

(221) 'Discours prononcé pour l'inauguration de la statue de Leconte de Lisle au Luxembourg', (10 July 1898), in Amori et dolori sacrum, pp. 265-266.

(222) ibid., pp. 265, 266.

(223) In Un Homme libre, 1922, pp. xiv-xv.

(224) Le Voyage de Sparte, éd. déf., Plon, 1922, p. 199.

(225) Mes Cahiers, II, p. 240.

(226) Preface to Amori et dolori sacrum, p. iii.

(227) Cit. DUHOURCAU, La Voix intérieure de Maurice Barrès d'après ses Cahiers, p. 199. No source given.

(228) Les Amitiés françaises, p. 237.

(229) Les Amitiés françaises, p. 253. The admission concerning this as a description of Barrès' character comes from his Chronique de la Grande Guerre, IV, p. 178, according to OUSTON, thesis cited, pp. 136 and 283.

(230) L'Âme romantique et le rêve, Paris, Corti, 1953, pp. 395-404. The words quoted are from p. 396.

Chapter X: ALFRED JARRY.

(i) Introduction.

Alfred Jarry still appears an enigmatic figure. Born at Laval (Mayenne) in 1873, he died - of meningeal tuberculosis brought on or aggravated by malnutrition and excessive drinking - in Paris in 1907, perhaps the most colourful, and certainly the most rigorous eccentric of the Paris of his day. Totally uncomprehended by the contemporary reading public and rejected by a society which he loathed and despised, his death passed almost unnoticed, and the greater part of his work remained in limbo until shortly after World War Two, when a Jarry revival began which has continued to the present day. Contemporaries were fascinated, puzzled, and at times repelled, by this bizarre midget of a man, with his outlandish dress (cyclist's attire, women's blouses) and behaviour (cult of bicycle-riding, of fire-arms, devotion to alcohol, delight in relating the most outlandish exploits). His escapades and the scandals he created became legendary. Small wonder, perhaps, that most of his contemporaries saw in Jarry merely an incarnation of his own character of 'le Père Ubu'. Moreover, most of what has been written about Jarry since his death is concerned solely or mainly with the more colourful and anecdotal aspects of his life. The task of this chapter is to attempt to discover the real reasons which lay behind his extravagances - to investigate the philosophical universe of Jarry as it is revealed in his writings(*).

(*) Unfortunately no reliable biographical study of Jarry has as yet been published, although fragments of one are /

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Several interpretations of Jarry's life and work have been put forward. According to the first of these, Jarry was above all simply a rebel against the society of his time; his life "ne fut qu'une provocation constante à toutes les conventions bourgeoises"(1); and, like Flaubert, he expressed "la révolte de tout son être devant la bêtise, la lâcheté et l'hypocrisie", "l'absolu de la révolte contre la totalité de la bêtise"(2).

Secondly, he has been seen as a 'metaphysical rebel'; realising the fundamental absurdity of the world, Jarry determined to confront absurdity with absurdity:

> la vie de Jarry [...] semble avoir été conduite par une pensée philosophique [...] Jarry s'est offert en hostie à la dérision et à l'absurdité du monde. [...] L'enseignement de Jarry pourrait se résumer ainsi: tout homme peut bafouer la cruauté et la stupidité de l'univers en faisant de sa vie propre un poème d'incohérence et d'absurdité. (3)

And he has even been described, somewhat rashly, as "la dernière incarnation, mais plus singulière que géniale, du dandy métaphysique"(4).

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/ to be found scattered throughout the 28 issues of the Cahiers and Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, published since 1950 by an eager group of Jarry enthusiasts and self-styled 'pataphysicians'. M. Noël Arnaud (member of the Collège and author of a recent biography of Boris Vian) has been for some years working on such a study, which is reported to be nearing completion; at the moment of writing, however, this has still not appeared.

Similar problems surround Jarry's works. An edition of the Oeuvres complètes d'Alfred Jarry appeared in 1948 in eight volumes, answering a pressing need but leaving much to be desired. The works are very carelessly edited, full of errors, and with many omissions - in fact, unpublished works have been turning up regularly ever since. Plans exist at the present moment for a further two editions of Jarry's Oeuvres complètes, one published by Gallimard (Ed. de la Pléiade), the other by the Club français du livre; but neither shows any signs of appearing. As a result, quotations where possible are referred both to the 1948 edition of Jarry's works, and to any subsequent authoritative versions of individual works where these exist.

A third interpretation, whilst acknowledging Jarry's nihilism as symbolised in the figure of Ubu, sees also in his work an attempt to go beyond the negation of existing values, and existing reality, to the creation of new values, and the revelation of a new, mystical or transcendental 'reality':

> Jarry molested and destroyed, for in the end he knew that his function would be constructive. [...] Beyond Jarry's nihilism there is a positive side to his work. Creating in Ubu a one-man demolition squad twenty years before Dada, he incorporated this figure into works that go on to broach transcendental values. (5)

Fourthly, it has been argued that above all else Jarry's aim in life was the creation of 'art', and in particular to realise a fusion, in his own person, of 'art' and 'life'. Thus André Breton writes:

> Nous disons qu'à partir de Jarry, bien plus que de Wilde, la différentiation tenue longtemps pour nécessaire entre l'art et la vie va se trouver contestée, pour finir anéantie dans son principe.(6)

And the friend of Jarry's declining years, Guillaume Apollinaire:

> Alfred Jarry a été homme de lettres comme on l'est rarement. Ses moindres actions, ses gamineries, tout cela, c'était de la littérature. C'est qu'il était fondé en lettres et en cela seulement. (7)

None of these views can be dismissed out of hand, and most of them do contain an element of truth: Jarry was in a sense a 'rebel'; there is a 'mystical' element in his work; and he certainly did strive, in a certain sense, to achieve a fusion of art and life. But a rebel against what, and in the name of what cause, if any? How great a degree of mystification does this 'mysticism' contain? What was the meaning for Jarry of the term 'art'? And above all else - the supreme enigma in the present case -

what are the sources of Jarry's, admittedly bizarre, philosophy? All these are questions to which the present chapter sets out to provide an answer. It will be argued that Jarry's view of the world is, both initially and finally, one that is resolutely nihilistic; that the roots of his nihilism are to be found in certain features of contemporary thought; and that in large part his attitude towards his own art (or literature) is determined by that same nihilism.

(ii) The Nihilism of Ubu.

The figure of Ubu represents in a sense both the beginning and the end of Jarry's work; he poses most clearly the problem of Jarry's nihilism which is to be resolved. We can best begin, therefore, with the question: what is the significance for Jarry himself of the figure of Ubu, and the reason for Jarry's systematic promotion of and identification with him?

Firstly, a few words must be said about the genesis of the Ubu cycle of plays and dramatic fragments. Much ink has been caused to flow by the question of the paternity of the play Ubu Roi; but Jarry never claimed the play as his exclusively. Its origins go back to the Lycée de Rennes, which Jarry attended from 1888 to 1891 and where a large number of fragments of schoolboy farces already existed before his arrival, centering around the unfortunate and incompetent physics master, M. Hébert, who, in the eyes of his pupils, incarnated "tout le grotesque qui fût au monde"(8). It was Jarry who invented the name Ubu, based upon earlier deformations - le père Ébé, le père Ebe, le P. H.

- of the name of M. Hébert. It was he likewise who gave the name Ubu Roi to a schoolboy farce of collective origins formerly known as Les Polonais(9).

The figure, and the original dramatic fragments, are thus a creation of the mind of the potache, the devilishly precocious schoolboy, whose attitude to the world has been well defined as "[la] négation, en apparence désinvolte, du monde des grandes personnes", coupled with "[une] étrange espèce de gaieté destructive et insensible"(10). There is nothing remarkable about this; what is remarkable is that, whilst most boys (as did Jarry's school-fellows) soon leave the stage of the potache, and its creations, far behind, Jarry did not. The spirit or attitude of the potache, along with the work and the figure which symbolised it, was carried by him far beyond his schooldays into adulthood.

It seems that at the moment of his arrival in Paris from Rennes in 1891, Jarry "pensait déjà à travers Ubu"; such at least is the testimony of his then close friend Léon-Paul Fargue(11). What is certain is that all the early published texts of Jarry - the Guignol, Visions actuelles et futures, Les Minutes de sable mémorial, César-Antéchrist - reveal the presence in his mind of the figure of Ubu. Maurice Saillet lists no fewer than six different publications, in one form or another, of fragments of the Ubu 'cycle' before the publication in volume form of Ubu Roi in 1896(12). The performance of this play at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in December 1896, moreover, was the culmination of a systematic and almost obsessive propaganda campaign on the part of Jarry lasting almost a year(13).

Whilst after this event, Jarry continued to provide puppet performances from time to time, and published several further editions of the various complete Ubu plays in addition to fragments incorporated into other works, and the two Almanachs du Père Ubu. As for the promotion of the figure of Ubu in Jarry's own life, no emphasis is required.

Jarry was evidently obsessed with the figure of Ubu from his schooldays onwards - a prelude to the more general fascination which the latter was soon to come to exercise(*). What, then, does Ubu represent for Jarry? He is not - at least in Ubu Roi, by far the most important of the Ubu plays - on the whole a satirical figure, a fact which Jarry took pains to emphasize. In his famous Discours at the première of the play, while thanking those critics favorable to the play, Jarry nonetheless protested against the fact that "leur bienveillance a vu le ventre d'Ubu gros de plus de satiriques symboles qu'on ne l'en a pu gonfler pour ce soir"(14). And in Les Paralipomènes d'Ubu, published on the eve of the first performance, he further specified:

> Ce n'est pas exactement Monsieur Thiers, ni le bourgeois, ni le mufle: ce serait plutôt l'anarchiste parfait, avec ceci qui empêche que nous devenions jamais l'anarchiste parfait, que c'est un homme, d'où couardise, saleté, laideur, etc.
>
> Des trois âmes que distingue Platon: de la tête, du coeur et de la gidouille, cette dernière seule, en lui, n'est pas embryonnaire. (15)(**)

(*) Typical was the reaction of Rachilde, who wrote after the première: "Ce polichinelle d'Ubu se mit à marcher tout seul, il s'évada de sa boîte [...]. Le type d'Ubu Roi devint légendaire. Il l'est encore et le restera." (Article on Jarry in the Mercure de France, August 1897. Cit. Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 26-27, p. 58.) Cf. also the many artists - amongst them Bonnard, Tanguy, Picasso - who have helped to immortalise 'le Père Ubu'.

(**) There was, however, one occasion on which Jarry allowed himself to be carried away by the enthusiasm of certain /

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Ubu therefore represents what is most 'animal' or 'bestial' in man, as symbolised by his 'gidouille' or belly; he is the very antithesis of Valéry's Monsieur Teste, who was presented to the French public in the same year as Ubu Roi (the work was also dedicated, incidentally, to the same man, Marcel Schwob)(16). As he rolls his bulk across the stage - and across the earth - Ubu becomes the great negator, the great leveller of all values; he is even, by self-definition, the archetype of all beauty (and therefore the negation of all concepts of beauty):

> La sphère est la forme parfaite, le soleil est l'astre parfait [...]. Plus parfait que le cylindre, moins parfait que la sphère, du Tonneau radie le corps hyperphysique. Nous, son isomorphe, sommes beau. (17)

Moreover, Ubu is not only an instrument of negation, he is also the great destroyer; Jarry has created or found in him, in the words of Roger Shattuck, "a one-man demolition squad twenty years before Dada"(18). Ubu smashes to pieces the existing 'order' and 'right', refusing to submit to them, recognizing nothing but the existence of his own whims and appetites:

> Semblable à un oeuf, une citrouille ou un fulgurant météore, je roule sur cette terre où je ferai ce qu'il me plaira. (19)

Most significant of all the quotations for his self-character-

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/ critics who saw in Ubu a satire of the bourgeoisie. In the article 'Questions de théâtre', published in the Revue Blanche for 1 Jan. 1897, he quoted from a review by Catulle Mendès: Ubu is "fait, comme l'a dit excellemment M. Catulle Mendès, "de l'éternelle imbécillité humaine, de l'éternelle luxure, de l'éternelle goinfrerie, de la bassesse de l'instinct érigée en tyrannie; des pudeurs, des vertus, du patriotisme et de l'idéal des gens qui ont bien dîné" [...]." (In Oeuvres complètes, IV, p. 158; Tout Ubu, ed. Maurice Saillet, [illegible] (Livre de Poche), p. 153). The last line of this quotation is clearly aimed at the bourgeois.

isation is his remark, in Ubu Roi, à propos of his newly-devised taxation system: "Avec ce système, j'aurai vite fait fortune, alors je tuerai tout le monde et je m'en irai."(20) The same phrase is reiterated in the 'Acte terrestre' of César-Antéchrist, and in the section of Les Minutes de sable mémorial entitled 'Les Prolégomènes de César-Antéchrist: II: Ubu parle', where its significance is further underlined by the fact that it stands alone as a characterisation of Ubu:

> Quand j'aurai pris toute la Phynance, je tuerai tout le monde et je m'en irai. (21)

The phrase sums up the logic of Ubu: external, moral restraints, values of any kind external to himself exist so little that he will do anything - destroy the whole world, annihilate the whole of mankind even - for the satisfaction of his own appetites, or whims. It is significant that at the end of both Ubu Roi and Ubu Enchaîné, Ubu finds himself on the High Seas, leaving a country where he has ravaged everything or turned everything upside down, in search of ... what? a new place wherein to wreak havoc? What else can he do but 'go away'?

Ubu himself, however, is not a nihilist: nihilism has been defined above as a product of self-conscious reflection, whereas he is naïvety itself. Ubu has not even reached the stage of reflection: hence his actions are not immoral, but amoral, or even better: pre-moral, the product of a terrifying innocence, But he *is* the measure of the nihilism of Jarry, in two senses of the word: as a symbol of the negation or 'levelling' of all values, and as a symbol of sheer will to destroy. He is the great leveller and the great

annihilator: "Je tuerai tout le monde et je m'en irai." Before all values, all ideals, all beliefs comes Ubu, constituting in the work of Jarry a symbol of almost hallucinatory power, a symbol in which there seems to crystallise a vision of a world in which all vestiges of 'civilisation', all values, ideals and beliefs have been destroyed or from which they have vanished(*).

It is clear also that Jarry intended us to see in Ubu a sort of Everyman, a symbol universally valid, He certainly intended the audience at the first performance of Ubu Roi to see itself in the character of Ubu, with all his characteristics of avarice, gluttony, stupidity and cowardice. This is what lies behind the deliberately paradoxical explanation of the setting of the play - "Nulle Part" - in the programme-brochure distributed to the spectators at the première:

> Nulle Part est partout, et le pays où l'on se trouve, d'abord. C'est pour cette raison qu'Ubu parle français [...]. (22)

And the intention is expressed quite explicitly in the article 'Questions de théâtre':

> J'ai voulu que, le rideau levé, la scène fût devant le public comme ce miroir des contes de Mme Leprince de Beaumont, où le vicieux se voit avec des cornes de taureau et un corps de dragon, selon l'exagération de ses vices; et il n'est pas étonnant que le public ait été stupéfait à la vue de son double ignoble [...]. (23)

The anger of the public - "la foule", as Jarry calls it - arose precisely from the fact, he claims, that this intention was fully grasped: "elle s'est fâchée parce qu'elle a trop bien compris, quoiqu'elle en dise"(24).

(*) Cf. also Maurice Saillet: "Cette bedaine insatiable vient avant toute croyance et toute poésie. Elle s'installe, sans âge, au centre de l'univers cosmique. Elle est le nombril du

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The performance of Ubu Roi was a deliberate act of defiance of the theatre-going public on the part of Jarry, giving rise to a scandal the like of which was not to be seen in Paris for many years to come. Laurent Tailhade described the première as "une date qui fit époque dans l'histoire du symbolisme", a veritable "bataille d'Hernani entre les jeunes écoles, symbolistes, décadentes, et la critique bourgeoise"(25). The day after the première, the whole of the Parisian press howled - occasionally with glee, far more often with fury and indignation. The bourgeois public was outraged at this "blague informe", feeling that it had been 'had'. Jarry was bitterly reproached with mystification; Francisque Sarcey summed up the general opinion when he wrote of the play: "C'est une fumisterie ordurière qui ne mérite que le silence du mépris [...]. La mesure est comble."(26) Even Henry Bauer, who had supported Jarry's campaign for the staging of the play from his post at L'Echo de Paris, wrote that: "A. Jarry se moquait et de lui et de nous"(27). Whilst at the première itself, Courteline, standing on a strapontin, had shouted at the audience: "Vous ne voyez pas que l'auteur se fout de nous?", and Jules Renard had left complaining that "on se fout du monde"(28).

None of them was mistaken. Jarry, indeed, "se foutait du monde". Amongst his papers deposited after his death at the offices of the Mercure was found a dossier of 14 pages in which he had carefully pasted a collection of press cuttings of reviews hostile to the play - the more outrageously stupid reviews (such as those of Henry Fouquier of Le

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Cont. from previous page:
/ monde, au regard duquel rien ne résiste: ni Dieu, ni la Nature, ni le dédale intime." (Sur la Route de Narcisse, Paris, Mercure de France, 1958, p. 13.)

Figaro) receiving particular attention. But none of the several lengthy reviews favorable to the play figure in this collection(29).

Jarry's famous "merdre!", flung in the face of the audience at the very beginning of the play, stands as a symbol of his whole attitude towards his public - which in this instance represents a microcosm of the world at large(*). His defiant contempt can be seen equally in his theoretical writings on the theatre, and in particular in his Discours at the première of 10 December 1896. In presenting the play, Jarry spoke from behind a table covered by a coal sack; his manner was, according to Rachilde, who was perhaps the person who knew him best (insofar as anyone knew Jarry well), "sec et froid"(30). Where the meaning of the speech was not deliberately placed out of range of the audience's understanding, Jarry descended into deliberate absurdity, as in his explanation of the 'cuts' he had been forced to make (in fact, there were not any):

> Nous allons passer avec trois actes qui sont sus et deux qui sont sus aussi grâce à quelques coupures. J'ai fait toutes les coupures qui ont été agréables aux acteurs (même de plusieurs passages indispensables au sens de la pièce) et j'ai maintenu pour eux des scènes que j'aurais volontiers coupées. (31)

(*) Jarry's scatology (along with the numerous forms of sexuality, and sexual inversion, to be found in his work) would provide a rich hunting ground for the psychoanalyst. From the "grand trou noir d'ousqu'on n'revient jamais" of La Chanson du Décervelage to "La Mer d'Habundes" of Faustroll, and other chapters of the same work, the whole summed up and symbolised in the famous "merdre", excremential references and allusions abound in the work of Jarry. It may be, however, that these reveal more than a mere obsession deriving from childhood traumas; behind Jarry's scatology there may well be a certain 'philosophical' intention. Alongside its function of expression his defiance of and contempt for the world around him, it seems also at times to perform the function of reducing all ideals, beliefs and values to the same level - a demonstration, in the most blatant and graphic manner possible, of the equivalence (in Jarry's eyes) of all values.

The same utter contempt for the public, and for humanity at large, - "la foule" - runs through the whole of the article 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre': the 'mob' understands nothing of the theatre; it is capable only of reactions learned in advance or dictated to it - "la foule comprenant non de soi, mais d'autorité"(32). And in an unpublished article written shortly after the preceding, entitled 'Douze Arguments sur le théâtre', this same absolute contempt for "la foule", along with an absolute distinction between "[le] petit nombre des intelligents" and "[le] grand nombre", runs through the whole of the twelve arguments(33). Whilst in 'Questions de théâtre', Jarry's reply to the critics of Ubu Roi, his contempt is even more total, if possible, for 'the mob' - "le public, illettré par définition"(34).

This gives us a clue to one of the reasons for Jarry's adoption of the personage of Ubu in his own life: Ubu both symbolizes his own nihilistic view of the world and expresses at the same time his contempt for all those around him - all, that is, except for a very small côterie of like-minded writers, artists or intellectuals, "le petit nombre des élus"(35).

But what are the sources of such an outlook? They must be sought in the fund of ideas common to the milieu - the semi-bohemian literary intelligentsia of the capital - in which Jarry, already a precocious young rebel in his schooldays at Rennes, came to intellectual maturity. Jarry takes up certain of the ideas or tendencies existing in this milieu, and carries them to an extreme which few, if any, of his contemporaries, attained.

(iii) Sources of Jarry: anarchistic individualism and symbolist solipsism.

Two influences in particular help to mould Jarry's nihilistic view of the world: the extreme individualism and 'anarchist' sympathies of the literary intelligentsia of the time, and the solipsistic tendencies inherent in the metaphysical theorizing of numerous writers belonging to the symbolist movement. Both of these factors have already been discussed at some length in previous chapters, and it will suffice here merely to recall briefly the most relevant features of each.

Jarry might well be taken as one of the finest representatives of the phenomenon of 'decadence', at least in its conception of art and in its preoccupation with various forms of sexual inversion. He was in complete sympathy with a generation of poets who sought to invent an ultra-refined language incomprehensible to the 'vulgar' bourgeois public and who defiantly proclaimed their belief in the social uselessness of art. No other writers of his time, moreover, manifests a more total contempt for and uncompromising rejection of the society in which he lived than Jarry. But where others in revolt against the values of nineteenth-century bourgeois society came to look back (as did Claudel or Bloy) to a romanticized, ideal Catholic past, and others (such as Jarry's friend Laurent Tailhade) were to seek a new sense of identity and purpose in embracing the cause of socialism, Jarry held out before himself no such past or future ideal.

He was certainly susceptible to the anarchist ferment

of the early 1890's and the sympathy for anarchism in symbolist milieux; his friends Marcel Schwob and Pierre Quillard both wrote articles in praise of Ravachol, and he himself was a regular contributor for several years to the anarcho-socialist Revue Blanche. But if Jarry uncompromisingly rejected the values of the bourgeois society of his day, if he treated the army and other social institutions with scorn and sarcasm(*), if he had nothing but contempt for the platitudes of a 'progressive' bourgeois ideology with its notions of 'Progress' and 'Justice'(**), he treated with equal scorn the socialist and humanitarian sympathies of many of the self-styled 'anarchists' of his time. His own 'anarchism' was a nihilistic individualism of the type described by Octave Mirbeau when he wrote: "La société est un mensonge, le progrès social un leurre, le pacte social est rompu. Il ne subsiste plus que l'individu, son tempérament, sa loi, sa conscience, sa volonté [...]."(36) In one of his earliest published texts, Visions actuelles et futures (1894), he dismisses the doctrines of an Emile Henry as patent absurdity (thereby contradicting in advance those who, two years later, will be tempted to see a 'politico-

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(*) Jarry's work contains numerous expressions of a loathing for the army. The novel Les Jours et les nuits is in part a satire upon army life. In Ubu Enchaîné (contemporary with the Dreyfus Affair) his attitude is summed up in the phrase: "Vive l'armerdre!". And in Le Périple de la littérature et de l'art he speaks of "les militaires actuels, chez qui on peut le plus commodément étudier les vestiges de l'âge de pierre, qu'ils conservent purs"(Oeuvres complètes, VII, p.153).

(**) Cf. his scathing review of a speech by Emile Combes and the secularised 'heaven-on-earth' which, according to Jarry, he offered to the masses: "Plus de paradis, mais l'Avenir, la Vérité, la Justice, le Progrès, tous égaux, tous bourgeois, tous élus, comme dans le discours du compagnon Un Tel sur le grand nombre des élus, un paradis social, quoi!" (Le Périple de la littérature et de l'art, O.C., VII, p. 152).

anarchist' significance in Ubu Roi):

> Vous traquez les anarchistes en bloc, je frappe la bourgeoisie en bloc, disait Emile Henry. Apparente logique éblouissante de potaches, absurdité guerroyant contre l'absurdité [...]. (37)

While in the Chanson du Décervelage (which dates, like the Ubu cycle, from the Lycée de Rennes, but was kept and promoted by Jarry for exactly the same reasons), it is not only the bourgeois who is vilified and repudiated: after the rentiers, it is the ouvrier ébéniste himself who is "précipité la tête en première / Dans l'grand trou noir d'ousqu'on n'revient jamais"(38).(*) And in a review, in the Mercure de France in 1896, of a well-meaning if naïve Journal d'un anarchiste by one Augustin Léger, Jarry expresses a perfect contempt for the anarcho-socialist doctrines expounded in the book; the concluding remarks of his review are:

> Livre qui tendrait à démontrer que les "overriers" anarchistes sont de mauvais littérateurs, et dont le héros est finalement guillotiné après boire, ainsi qu'il convient. (39)

Nowhere in Jarry's work can one find the slightest trace of any positive social or political sympathies. Nothing lay

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(*) Without going so far as to allege any direct influence, it is possible to see a parallel between the moral atmosphere of such works as this grotesque schoolboy song and other elements of the Ubu 'cycle', preserved and promoted by Jarry, with their "machine à décerveler", etc., and the equally lurid proclamations, during this era of anarchist terrorism, of various anarchist journals and newspapers, which recommend the murder of members of the 'boss' class by similarly gruesome means - fire, poison, knife, gun - and the destruction of property. To take a typical example, cf. the following from L'Action révolutionnaire of Nîmes in 1887:

"Armons-nous de tous les moyens que nous donne la science; faisons disparaître cette société aux institutions criminelles basées sur l'égoïsme le plus effréné, pillons, brûlons, DÉTRUISONS.

"Mettons-nous hardiment à l'oeuvre, que chacun de nous agisse librement selon son tempérament et sa manière de voir, par le feu, le poignard, le poison, que chaque coup porté dans le corps social bourgeois y fasse une plaie profonde!..." (Cit. Jean MAITRON, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France, p. 196. Italics in original.)

further from him than a belief in social progress of any kind(*).

This anarchistic individualism, moreover, leads in the case of Jarry (as with a number of his contemporaries) to a falling back upon the individual 'self', above all in his metaphysical thinking. To understand Jarry fully, it is necessary to see him against the background of the 'idealism' of the symbolist movement with both its 'mystical' and solipsistic tendencies(**). From the moment of his arrival in Paris, Jarry plunged into the literary life of the

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(*) Perhaps most characteristic of all is Jarry's attitude towards what was certainly, for a French 'intellectual' in the 1890's, the most burning question of the day and the touchstone of political and social attitudes: the Dreyfus Affair. In one of his Gestes, Jarry devotes a long article to the 'Affair', engaging in satire and 'debunking' ad libitum, yet refusing to take sides (Oeuvres complètes, VII, pp. 96-101). In one of his Périples he again deals with the matter, again taking a detached and distant view, cynically considering the whole affair as a 'spectacle' - or military circus - offered to the populace for its amusement (Text reprinted in Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 3, pp. 39-40; not in O.C.). And the Almanach du Père Ubu illustré (Jan.-March 1899) contains, under the heading 'Ephéremides actuelles', a short play entitled L'Ile du Diable, pièce secrète en 3 ans et plusieurs tableaux, which is modelled on the Affair (Captain Bordure being the unfortunate Dreyfus, and Père Ubu representing his persecutors). The play has the appearance of satire; but again the satire is in fact directed at everyone concerned. Jarry's own 'position' is a refusal of any position.

A discordant note seems to be struck, however, by one of Jarry's Périples, in which he declares himself convinced of the innocence of Dreyfus: "Nous allons jusqu'à penser qu'il est le type du soldat et du bon offier subalterne, tout discipline et loyauté" (O.C., VII, p. 215). Can this be the same Jarry speaking? Or, as seems far more likely, is this - as with so many other things - said with tongue in cheek? The reference to the qualities of the 'good' army officer certainly suggests this, given Jarry's known opinion of army 'discipline' and 'loyauté'!

(**) For the most part there is little or no explicit evidence of an influence upon Jarry of specific writers or thinkers; but it is possible to demonstrate a continuity ~~of~~ between his thought and that of certain contemporaries, as well as certain personal contacts, which render such influences at the very least highly probable.

capital; his first published text appeared in L'Echo de Paris in April 1893 (Jarry was only 19 at the time), in the literary supplement edited by Marcel Schwob; and through Schwob he soon met Catulle Mendès, Octave Mirbeau, Félix Fénéon, and the supreme master, Mallarmé. He also met Alfred Vallette, editor of the newly founded Mercure de France, and his novelist wife Rachilde; Vallette published his first book, Les Minutes de sable mémorial (1894), and through him Jarry was introduced to the whole of the symbolist cohort assembled around the Mercure, amongst them Remy de Gourmont. From the first, Jarry's work reveals an amazing erudition, an extremely wide reading, and reveals him to be fully abreast of all the cults and fashions of the day: anarchism, mysticism, occultism, heraldry, the cabbala, and the rest. Most important of all, from the time of his earliest published work onwards a marked tendency towards solipsism is already strikingly apparent in the work of Jarry(*).

The most important direct source of this tendency seems to be Jarry's one-time friend and collaborator, Remy de Gourmont. The two worked together to edit the first four

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(*) In one of his last-published texts, Albert Samain, Jarry briefly evoked the rapture and "éblouissement" of his discovery, upon his arrival in Paris, of symbolist literature, constituting a veritable "nouveau monde" for him: "On imagine à peine aujourd'hui, où les révolutionnaires d'un peu lointain passé sont des gloires admises, l'éblouissement que ne connurent peut-être point d'autres générations et qui, vers 1892, transporta maints jeunes hommes de vingt ans, amoureux de belles lettres et croyant alors ne les point ignorer, quand leur fut révélée une littérature qui s'avisait manifestement l'unique - au moins - à leurs enthousiasmes d'alors. [...] le verset de l'Apocalypse n'est point trop grandiloquent: "le ciel se replia comme un livre qu'on roule" [...]," (O.C., VII, pp. 320-321).

issues of L'Ymagier (first published in October 1894), until a break occurred in their friendship owing to the activities of Gourmont's mistress(*). Gourmont's Le Latin mystique (1890), translations of and erudite commentaries upon little-known religious and mystical works of the Middle Ages, seems to have inspired many of the themes of Jarry's César-Antéchrist (1895) - amongst others, the very figure of 'Caesar-Antichrist' himself, based on mediaeval legends of the Emperor Nero; the contorted symbolism of Christ and the Tree-cross; and the work's apocalyptic visions of the end of the world. Whilst in this work and in his novels, Jarry's treatment of and pronouncements concerning 'reality' bear a marked resemblance to Gourmont's conceptions as outlined both in his theoretical writings and in his novels.

Gourmont's enthusiastic definition of his philosophical 'idealism' in the preface to Le Livre des Masques (1896) has already been noted(**). No less significant - particularly in view of the date of their appearance - are his equally enthusiastic affirmations in a work of 1893 entitled L'Idéalisme(40). Commenting upon Schopenhauer's aphorism "le monde est ma représentation", he writes:

(*) Berthe (de) Courrière, who attempted to seduce Jarry, but whose advances were savagely spurned. The third chapter - 'Chez la Vieille Dame' - of L'Amour en visites (1898) is a savage satire of the incident, one which almost landed Jarry in prison. All the same, Berthe may have been instrumental in obtaining Jarry's release from the army (to escape from military service, Jarry swallowed a large dose of poison!).

(**) Cf. chapter 5, supra, and in particular the lines: "Par rapport à l'homme, sujet pensant, le monde, tout ce qui est extérieur au moi, n'existe que selon l'idée qu'il s'en fait. [...] C'est ce que Schopenhauer a vulgarisé sous cette formule si simple et si claire: Le monde est ma représentation. Je ne vois pas ce qui est; ce qui est, c'est ce que je vois. Autant d'hommes pensants, autant de mondes divers et peut-être différents."

> Les conséquences logiques de ces aphorismes sont nettes: on ne connaît que sa propre intelligence, que soi, seule réalité, le monde spécial et unique que le moi détient, véhicule, déforme, exténue, recrée selon sa personnelle activité; rien ne se meut en dehors du sujet connaissant; tout ce que je pense est réel: la seule réalité, c'est la pensée. (41)

In such a doctrine Gourmont finds the necessary justification for the 'self' of the individual to turn away from the "problématiques contingences" of the external world; the 'self' is both self-sufficient and, by the nature of things, completely isolated:

> La relativité de l'extérieur étant bien établie, nul besoin, théoriquement, pour le moi, de se mêler à de problématiques contingences; il se suffit à lui-même, et il le faut, puisqu'il est isolé de ses semblables autant que deux planètes du système solaire. Convaincu que tout est transitoire, hormis sa pensée, qui est éternelle (en ce sens qu'elle capte la lumière); convaincu qu'il est seul et impénétrablement seul, comme une molécule douée seulement d'un pouvoir de cohérence; convaincu enfin que tout est parfaitement illusoire [...]; bien assuré qu'il ne peut sortir de l'état égoïste que pour retomber dans l'état per-égoïste, - l'idéaliste se désintéresse de toutes les relativités telles que la morale, la patrie, la sociabilité, les traditions, la famille, la procréation, ces notions reléguées dans le domaine pratique.(42)

Should, however, the conceptions of this idealism be carried over onto the social and political plane, argues Gourmont, they lead of necessity first to anarchy ("Un individu est un monde; cent individus font cent mondes, et les uns aussi légitimes que les autres: l'idéaliste ne saurait donc admettre qu'un seul type de gouvernement, l'anarchie"), but ultimately to despotism, "la domination de tous par quelques-uns" - these few being "les esprits supérieurs [...], les génies". The supreme value - indeed the only value - in such a world is the particular "représentation du monde" conceived by this elect few - for the sake of which it matters little if all others are 'annihilated'(43).(*)

(*) Gourmont takes up this question of the 'social' consequ- / Cont.

The "expression esthétique" of this idealism is of course symbolism. "Le Symbolisme [...] se traduit littéralement par le mot Liberté et, pour les violents, par le mot Anarchie."(44) The appeal of such ideas to the young Jarry needs no emphasis, and may well have helped to shape his own literary conceptions. Indeed, Gourmont's statement of his aesthetic in the preface to Le Livre des Masques of 1896 could be taken as that of Jarry also:

> Le crime capital pour un écrivain c'est le conformisme, l'imitativité, la soumission aux règles et aux enseignements. [...] La seule excuse qu'un homme ait d'écrire, c'est de s'écrire lui-même, de dévoiler aux autres la sorte de monde qui se mire en son miroir individuel; sa seule excuse est d'être original [...]. Il doit se créer sa propre esthétique, - et nous devrons admettre autant d'esthétiques qu'il y a d'esprits originaux [...].
>
> Admettons donc que le symbolisme, c'est, même excessive, même intempestive, même prétentieuse, l'expression de l'individualisme dans l'art. (45)(*)

(*) Similar ideas are expressed in Gourmont's novel Sixtine of 1890. Its hero, Hubert d'Entragues, defines artistic creation as simply the self-projection of the artist: "On se raconte soi-même, on ne peut même raconter que cela: l'oeuvre d'un artiste, c'est la lente et quotidienne réaction de l'intelligence et de la volonté sur tel amas de cellules /

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/ ences of his theory of idealism in an essay dated February 1894, 'Dernière conséquence de l'idéalisme'. Here he maintains that, "poussée à son extrême, la théorie idéaliste [aboutit], pratiquement, au néronisme ou au fakirisme, selon qu'elle évolue en des intelligences actives ou en des intelligences passives; socialement [...] au despotisme ou à l'anarchie" (In La Culture des Idées, Mercure de France, 1964, p. 258). These ideas are taken up and their inherent paradoxes developed by Jarry in César-Antéchrist (1895) As an illustration of "le fakirisme-anarchie", Gourmont refers the reader to "un singulier conte" of Marcel Schwob, 'L'Ile de la liberté' (published in L'Echo de Paris in July 1892). Schwob was one of Jarry's earliest contacts and subjects of admiration in the literary world of Paris; Ubu Roi was dedicated to him, as was also a chapter in Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien (1898). One of the features of Schwob's work which undoubtedly appealed to Jarry was his blurring of the line between reality and fiction - as for example in his Vies imaginaires (1896).

Our chief concern for the moment, however, is with Jarry's metaphysics rather than with his aesthetics, and here the parallels are no less striking. Jarry begins by postulating the same radical dualism as Gourmont and other symbolist theorists between the individual 'self' and 'the world' (a dualism expressed in his Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien in the terminology of his pataphysical 'science of exceptions': "Faustroll définissait l'univers ce qui est l'exception de soi"(46)). From this follows the idea of withdrawal into the world of the 'self'; the theme is first grandiosely announced in Jarry's second major published work, César-Antéchrist (1895), in which Caesar proclaims:

> Je n'ai que faire de cette extérieure représentation et je passe aveugle et sourd sur la terre, me contemplant moi-même, sûr qu'on ne peut rien m'adjoindre d'externe [...]. Si je m'amuse à marcher sur la terre comme un clown sous qui tourne une boule, je m'en abstrais par l'oubli, qui est du présent comme du passé. (47)(*)

More significantly, the theme recurs in two of the most personal works of Jarry, Les Jours et les nuits (1897) and L'Amour absolu (1899). The central, and indeed sole, character of the latter, Emmanuel Dieu, "n'a d'autre prison

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(*) There almost seems to be an echo in this of the words of Gourmont's d'Entragues, as the latter expresses his doubts concerning the reality of the outside world: "Y a-t-il un monde de vie extérieure à moi-même? C'est possible, mais je ne le connais pas. Le monde, c'est moi, il me doit l'existence, je l'ai créé avec mes sens, il est mon esclave et nul sur lui n'a de pouvoir." (Sixtine, ed. cit., p. 13).

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/ individuelles." (Mercure de France, 1918 ed., p. 76). Whilst one of his friends paradoxically claims 'nature' itself to be a creation of the artist: "La nature! mais c'est l'artiste qui la crée, la nature, et l'art n'est que la faculté d'objectiver en un simulacre la représentation individuelle du monde." (ibid., pp. 75-76).

que la boîte de son crâne, et n'est qu'un homme qui rêve assis près de sa lampe"(48). Shut up thus in his own subjectivity - inside his own skull, to use Jarry's symbolism - Emmanuel Dieu is totally alone, with only himself as an interlocutor: "Ce ne peut être que l'éternel incarcéré, de qui toutes les paroles répondent à des interrogatoires."(49)(*) The same absolute solitude is to be found in the also partially autobiographical 'hero' of Les Jours et les nuits, Sengle - as the name implies (Jarry derives it from the Latin singulum, via Rutebeuf: "Sans avoir m'a laissié tout sengle"(50)).(**) Moreover, Jarry describes the 'instinct

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(*) Jarry wrote of L'Amour absolu: "J'ai eu la fantaisie - en 1899 et par les soins du Mercure - de faire tirer un de mes livres à très petit nombre et en fac-similé autographique. Ce [redacted] livre s'appelle L'Amour Absolu. [...] C'était une fantaisie, pour pouvoir donner le manuscrit autographié à quelques amis." (Letter published in Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 11, p. 13). Despite the modesty of these pretensions, the novel is one of the most important for an insight into the mind of its author. The substance of the novel - or long poem - is made up largely of a 'transposition romanesque' of Jarry's childhood and youthful memories: memories of his early years of schooling at Laval, his boyhood in Britanny, his early years in Paris. Amongst features of the hero worth noting are: his extreme attachment to his mother (culminating in the suggestion of incestuous love); his extreme solitude, and consequent misery, amongst his schoolmates most notably, but generally everywhere except with his mother; a very marked misogyny; and a marked consciousness of, and perhaps even an obsession with, death.

(**) Les Jours et les nuits is, with L'Amour absolu, the most clearly personal or autobiographical of the works of Jarry. It is based on the experiences of the latter during his period of military service, and a subsidiary theme of the novel is a vicious satire upon army life. Amongst the external resemblances between the hero Sengle and Jarry one may note: they both are Bretons, wear long hair, are devoted to literature, are fervent cyclists and fencers, and are both of unusually small stature. Such external resemblances suggest that the value of the work as a personal document is considerable. All the same, one should note its sub-title 'roman d'un déserteur' - and not 'journal', as some writers on Jarry have mistakenly stated.

of self-preservation' of Sengle in terms strikingly reminiscent of those of Barrès' 'Culte du Moi':

> Il y a deux instincts de conservation, le noble et l'ignoble. L'instinct noble est l'instinct de conserver son moi et de maintenir son individualité impénétrable aux forces extérieures. (51)

He even, though with a touch of facetiousness, invokes the authority of divine commandments for this supreme egoism: "Les commandements altruistes: "Le bien d'autrui..." sont d'aristocratiques formules d'isolement."(52) Despite this touch, however, it seems fair to say of Jarry that he too felt himself to be 'imprisoned' within his own mind (or 'skull'), "l'éternel incarcéré".

This radical dualism of the 'self' and 'the world' is frequently expressed in Jarry's work by a symbolism of light and darkness. His wish and fiat is the opposite of the divine "Let there be light!"; as expressed in the title of the opening chapter of L'Amour absolu - Jarry's own curiously contorted version of the Creation and the Passion rolled into one -, it is: "Que la ténèbre soit!". This symbolism recurs also in César-Antéchrist, where the latter is "le Prince des Ténèbres". And in an article on Rachilde, entitled 'Ce que c'est que les Ténèbres' (reviewing her novel La Princesse des Ténèbres), Jarry wrote:

> L'en-deça de l'individu est un au-delà pour la foule...
> Cela commence où il n'y a plus de prisme.
> Cela commence où il n'y a plus de soleil. [...]
> A propos: l'autre monde, c'est peut-être pour les autres, si l'auteur est quelqu'un, le home de l'auteur. (53)

Light means life; darkness stands for the withdrawal from 'life' into the 'self'- into dream and hallucination, and towards death. Seen in this perspective, the sub-title of Les Jours et les nuits - 'roman d'un déserteur' - takes on

a new dimension. Sengle is not only a deserter, or would-be deserter, from the army; he is also a deserter from the day into the night, escaping into a world of dream and hallucination in order to forget "l'ablation des cervelles" and "l'enlaidissement des corps" of his daily military existence(54). And for Sengle, as for Emmanuel Dieu, the world takes on the reality only of a dream.

These two, at least, find themselves in a situation of clear solipsism. As with Gourmont's d'Entragues, the world loses all feeling of reality for Sengle, and, far from seeing himself as an object acted upon by the external world, he becomes (or imagines himself as) a subject directing and controlling that world at will:

> Sengle s'était cru le droit, de par son influence expérimentée sur l'habitus de petits objets, d'induire l'obéissance probable du monde. (55)

And the imagined relationship becomes such that Sengle sees himself as the captain of a ship steering his vessel: "Le monde n'était qu'un immense bateau, avec Sengle au gouvernail."(56) Events in the novel take on an impressions of unreality, as if they were but a dream in the mind of Sengle. And such an impression is even clearer in L'Amour absolu, where events, other characters, and even time itself, appear as simply projections of the mind of Emmanuel Dieu.

Even love, in Jarry's work, is swallowed up by this solipsistic tendency, becoming a purely individual and narcissistic experience, and fusing with the unreality of dream. It is necessary here to open a brief parenthesis concerning the sexual-emotional life of Jarry. The details do not concern us, but a few comments are essential in order to present a full picture of the causes and nature of Jarry's

solipsism.

Of Jarry's own private life in this regard very little is known. Apart from youthful boasting amongst his schoolmates, there is no evidence of a relationship with any woman, and Jarry-Ubu is reported to have declared categorically: "Nous n'aimons pas les femmes du tout."(57) Hints or open expressions of an often violent misogyny occur throughout his work, and even at times an expression of physical disgust provoked by women - as in the youthful Haldernablou or the satirical L'Amour en visites (1898). The apparent lyricism of parts of Le Surmâle seems to contradict such an attitude, yet Jarry's misogyny reappears as violently as ever in the portrayal of Jeanne Sabrenas in his last novel, La Dragonne. There are hints also, in L'Amour en visites, of impotence on the part of the hero in some chapters, and it has been suggested that Jarry himself may have been a victim of 'psychological impotence' - a result of his extreme timidity - in the presence of any woman(58). On the other hand, there is clear evidence of homosexual tendencies and relations: Haldernablou, for example, is a transposition of Jarry's relationship with the young Léon-Paul Fargue(59); and other indications are reported from later periods of his life(60).

Whether on account of personal frustrations or not, one finds in Jarry's work a preoccupation with sexual themes of the order of an obsession, from Haldernablou through Les Minutes de sable mémorial, César-Antéchrist, Les Jours et les nuits, L'Amour absolu, L'Amour en visites, to Messaline and Le Surmâle. Maurice Saillet sees on the part of Jarry an attempt to dominate the sexual 'problem' (as with all other

'problems' of life) by the invention of what he calls "mythes simplificateurs" - in this instance that of the Phallus -, by the reduction of these problems to the level of symbols. One of his favorite procedures, in fact, is to reduce all things to mathematical symbols, and then to juggle these about; whence the playing - in pseudo-mathematical or heraldic terms - with sexual themes in César-Antéchrist (in particular in the scene between Fasce, the Templar and the "Bâton-à-physique") or in Faustroll. Saillet traces through Jarry's work what he sees as "ses démêlés avec l'amour, [...] sa peur de l'amour et [les] fables qu'il invente pour s'en guérir"(61). Perhaps Jarry's attempt at a 'cure' did in part succeed; at least the treatment of sexual themes in later works such as Messaline (1901) and Le Surmâle (1902) is decidedly freer and more detached. More important here, however, is the fact that this 'fear of love' on the part of Jarry, his fear of contact with other human beings, tends to develop into a form of sexual narcissism which combines with and reinforces a philosophical solipsism.

The work in which the theme of narcissism-solipsism is most fully developed is Les Jours et les nuits. The 'amorous' relationship that exists between Sengle and his brother Valens (which we are warned is not a physical relationship for a start: "Le mot Adelphisme serait plus juste et moins médical d'aspect qu'Uranisme, malgré son exacte étymologie sidérale. Sengle, pas sensuel, n'était capable que d'amitié."(62)) turns out not to be a 'relationship' between two people at all. Sengle is not even sure, in fact, that his brother Valens ever really existed(63);

the latter is simply a mirror held up to Sengle himself, of which he has need only because he is "dépourvu de toute mémoire"; but in fact Sengle is 'in love' only with himself - or more exactly, with the thought, or the memory, of himself:

> Et Sengle, amoureux du Souvenir de Soi, avait besoin d'un ami vivant et visible, parce qu'il n'avait aucun souvenir de Soi, étant dépourvu de toute mémoire. (64)

And this purely individual and narcissistic experience of 'love' becomes - as in L'Amour absolu - a fusion with dream, similar to the enjoyment of one's dreams (or day-dreams) for their own sake - "l'égoïsme parfait et le véritable" -, and an access to 'Eternity':

> Sengle découvrait la vraie cause métaphysique du bonheur d'aimer: non la communion de deux êtres devenus un, comme les deux moitiés du coeur de l'homme, qui est isolément double chez le foetus; mais la jouissance de l'anachronisme et de causer avec son propre passé [...]. Il est admirable de vivre deux moments différents du temps en un seul; ce qui est suffisant pour vivre authentiquement un moment d'éternité, soit toute l'éternité, puisqu'elle n'a pas de moment. (65)(*)

The 'self' is thus the creator not only of its own world, but even of 'Time'(**). Jarry has reached a state of near-

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(*) Fascinating as this apparent attempt to out-Proust Proust seems at first glance, the element of spoofing that exists within the passage quoted must put us on our guard against too readily pinning this theory as such on Jarry himself. And this is even truer of the lines which follow, with their purely fanciful examples of the 'thesis' propounded - Shakespeare's skull and the Holy Trinity:"C'est aussi énorme que le vraisemblable sursaut de Shakespeare, revenu dans tel musée de Stratford-on-Avon, où l'on montre encore "son crâne à l'âge de cinq ans". C'est la jubilation de Dieu le Père un et deux dans son Fils, et la perception qu'a le premier terme de son rapport avec le second n'a pu donner moins que l'Esprit-Saint." (Les Jours et les nuits, O.C., V, p. 192; Mercure de France edition, 1964, pp. 55-56.) All that one can safely say, therefore, is that such a passage as the above reveals the tendency of Jarry's thinking.

(**) K. D. UITTI (The Concept of Self in the Symbolist Novel, The Hague, 1961, p. 62) writes of the manner in which, in Gourmont's Le Fantôme, everything in the novel, including Time, is a projection of the Self of the central character, a /

Cont.

total solipsism in which the individual imagination is absolute; the creative self enjoys a total freedom. 'Reality' and 'truth' are merely a creation of the individual will or desire - as is the case with Emmanuel Dieu:

> La Vérité humaine, c'est ce que l'homme veut: un désir.
> La Vérité de Dieu, ce qu'il crée.
> Quand on n'est ni l'un ni l'autre - Emmanuel -, sa Vérité, c'est la création de son désir. (66)

But such a solipsism is also totally nihilistic - a realisation which appears to be present in Jarry's work from the very beginning. If all 'reality' and 'truth' is but a creation of the individual mind - the individual will and imagination - then all realities and truths are equally valid, and all are equally 'imaginary'. All are, in the terms of Jarry's pataphysics, "des solutions imaginaires". The situation of man in the world is one of total and irremediable solitude, and every action and every belief is equally arbitrary, equally illusory, equally 'absurd'. It is this belief which underlies the whole of Jarry's 'science' of pataphysics.

(iv) The Science of Pataphysics.

Confusion surrounds the exact nature and purpose of Jarry's pataphysics, whose principles are outlined in his Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien (67). It is certainly based on the notion of the illusoriness and arbitrariness of existing 'truth' and 'reality'; but an ambiguity arises when Jarry appears to present it also as an attempt to substitute for these a new truth and reality -

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Cont. from previous page:
/ creation of the Self through language: "Language is a faculty of Self. Time exists only apart from temporal boundaries, /
(Carried over to following page.)

as for example in the epigraph to Ubu Enchaîné of 1899:

> Cornegidouille! nous n'aurons point tout démoli si nous ne démolissons même les ruines! Or je n'y vois d'autre moyen que d'en équilibrer de beaux édifices bien ordonnés.

Thus critics such as René Massat, editor of the 1948 edition of Jarry's works(68), or A. Rolland de Renéville(69), have tried to read into Jarry's work a 'mystical' interpretation of some kind. More seriously, a critic such as Roger Shattuck has been led to see in Faustroll an attempt to create new values, of a transcendental order:

> In a grotesque symmetry, Faustroll moves in the opposite direction from the Ubu plays and forms their complement. Beneath the highly congested surface, and in spite of its desultory structure, one senses in Faustroll the search for a new reality, a stupendous effort to create out of the ruins Ubu had left behind a new system of values - the world of pataphysics. (70)

Yet a closer look at the above epigraph reveals that this fine new edifice which must be constructed - that of Jarry's pataphysics - is not intended to stand in the place of the old world that now lies in ruins at all, but to be an instrument for completely sweeping away even those remaining ruins - a 'construction' which is in fact designed to complete the task of destruction. And pataphysics is in reality quite simply a new 'system' which will yet more effectively sweep away the old.

In order to demonstrate this, we must begin once again

Note carried over from previous page:
/ as an eternal present, a coefficient of Self. Past, present, future - all are contained in memory, and memory is no more than a kind of linguistic consciousness [...]." Uitti's remarks would apply equally well to Les Jours et les nuits and even more admirably to L'Amour absolu. It is possible, though not of course certain, that Jarry has here again been influenced by Gourmont.

with the question of genesis. As with Ubu, the origin of the term 'pataphysics' goes back to the Lycée de Rennes. We have seen that Ubu was initially, for Jarry, the symbol of his potachisme, of the attitude of negation of "le monde des grandes personnes". And speaking of the play Ubu Roi, written by a schoolboy, Jarry draws attention to "le principe de synthèse que trouve l'enfant créateur en ses professeurs"(71). The particular teacher concerned here, of course, was a physics master; and through him, the potache Jarry came to call into question not only the authority and moral values of adult society, but also the most vaunted product of nineteenth-century bourgeois society: its Science. From M. Hébert's "science en physique" is born the antithesis and the negation of 'science': pataphysics. And as one might well expect, the science of pataphysics is originally intimately associated with Père Ubu. It is in fact in Jarry's first ever published text that the term first appears (was it a mere accident that precisely this text should have been the first of Jarry's to achieve publication?): Père Ubu introduces himself as a "pataphysicien" and proclaims pompously that "la pataphysique est une science que nous avons inventée et dont le besoin se faisait généralement sentir"(72)(*)

(*) There can be no doubt that the term itself goes back to the vocabulary of the Lycée de Rennes. Had it been Jarry's own invention, its form would, according to J.-H. SAINMONT ('Jarry et la 'Pataphysique', Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 1), have been more Greek; and Jarry himself, when he comes to propose an etymology (!) for the term, presents us with a fanciful Greek etymology: épi (metà tà physikà) (Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien, O.C., I, p. 217). It seems that the unfortunate M. Hébert constantly invoked his "science en physique", which soon became, in some of the early Ubu fragments, "science en pataphysique". In these early fragments, this 'science' seems to have enabled 'le Père Ebe' to act upon phenomena in a peremptory and miraculous way, and even to have constituted an occult or magic source of knowledge.

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Two other schoolboy concepts were, with pataphysics, promoted to 'philosophical respectability' by Jarry - the 'bâton-à-physique' of M. Hébert, and the principle of the 'identity of opposites'. The first was initially a crude sexual symbol; but, by an act of mystification on Jarry's part, it is converted in César-Antéchrist into a kind of universal principle - a mathematical symbol developed in the dialogue (Act II, Scene 6) between Fasce and the Templar, a dialogue described by one critic as "toute une étonnante mathématique sexuelle"(73). Jarry's predilection for reducing all things to mathematical symbols, which then, as in an equation, cancel each other out, has already been mentioned; thus the 'bâton-à-physique' becomes the agent effecting and demonstrating the principle of the 'identity of opposites'(*). But this identity is not a resolution of all antitheses in some sort of Hegelian absolute; the identity to which Jarry reduces all oppositions is one of a common meaninglessness; his 'unity' is the unity of zero(**).

(*) Cf. in chapter 39 of Faustroll where the reader is referred to "un grand livre qui a pour titre César-Antéchrist, où se trouve la seule démonstration pratique, par l'engin mécanique dit bâton à physique, de l'identité des contraires". (O.C., I, p. 314.)

(**) The reference in Faustroll again furnishes a clue, when we are told that César-Antéchrist has been written by "le / Cf. the following examples: Cont.

Cont. from previous page:
"Ce n'est pas que nous ne puissions, par notre science en pataphysique, faire surgir de terre les mets les plus exquis [...]." (Ubu Cocu, Act II, Sc. 2).
"Nous imaginerons, au moyen de notre science en physique et aidé des lumières de nos conseillers, une voiture à vent pour transporter toute l'armée." (Ubu Roi, Act IV, Sc. 3).
"Nous le savons par notre science en pataphysique." (Les Minutes de sable mémorial, O.C., IV, p. 186. The term "pataphysique" also occurs twice in the 'Linteau' which precedes this work, and a further twice in the course of Les Minutes.)

Pataphysics, then, was initially a schoolboy joke which Jarry, by a supreme act of mystification, chose to raise to the level of a universal 'science'. But although there is deliberate mystification in this, Jarry's action was more than mere capriciousness on his part. Far from being ignorant in scientific matters, he was on the contrary fully abreast of the latest developments in contemporary scientific thought, in which he remained interested all his life. At the moment of obtaining his baccalauréat, in fact, he hesitated for a moment between preparing himself for the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Ecole Polytechnique, finally opting for the former (and then, after a year's preparation at the Lycée Henri IV, abandoning his studies for literature)(*). The 'mature' statement of the principles of pataphysics in his work arises in fact from a conjunction between his

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(*) Cf. the portrait traced of Jarry by his former classmate and close friend at the Lycée de Rennes, Henri Morin - become by this time an army officer and respectable citizen -, in 1922: "Jarry lui-même était un esprit très clair - il était à dix-sept ans aussi bon mathématicien que rhétoricien brillant et, après avoir passé son bachot ès lettres 1re partie, il fut sur le point de se tourner vers les études scientifiques, ce qui aurait été beaucoup plus conforme aux désirs de sa famille que la voie qu'il suivit par la suite - mais en même temps qu'un esprit clair, c'était un grand pince-sans-rire et un grand mystificateur." (Cit. J.-H. Sainmont, 'Ubu ou la création d'un mythe', Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 3-4, p. 60.)

Cont. from previous page:
/ R. P. Ubu de la Cie de Jésus, ancien roi de Pologne"!

Also associated originally with Père Hébert's 'pataphysique', and equally the subject of a schoolboy joke, were the palotins - originally the pupils of the Lycée de Rennes, become Père Ubu's followers and aides. In the text Visions actuelles et futures of 1893, these creatures too are raised to the plane of philosophical 'significance': "La pataphysique est la science de ces êtres actuels ou futurs, avec le pouvoir de leur usage (disciplus)". They are also described - significantly, in view of Jarry's deliberate or wilful distortion of reality through his pataphysics - as "les seuls / Parfaits pour qui veut que sa Volonté s'érige / Loi souveraine [...]". (Published in L'Art Littéraire, Nouvelle série, No. 5, March 1894. Reprinted in Cahiers du Coll. de 'Pataphysique, No. 1.)

schoolboy inversion of M. Hébert's "science en physique", and the contemporary critique of the nature and pretensions of science which in France goes back to the work of Ravaisson, Lachelier and Boutroux, and which was continued by Jarry's philosopher teacher at the Lycée Henri IV, Henri Bergson. Although explicit evidence of an influence of Bergson (or of any other philosopher) upon Jarry is lacking, there is abundant implicit evidence for such an influence. A close study of his work reveals that Jarry takes up certain of the chief ideas contained in this critique of science and, in a characteristically personal manner, distorts them and carries them to the extreme of a deliberate nihilism(*).

The fullest outline of Jarry's pataphysics, as well as its most revealing application, is to be found in Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien (74). This is also the richest and most dense of all Jarry's works, encyclopaedic in character, and opening up a field of almost infinite speculation by its multiple allusions and cross-references (It is filled with allusions to personalities and events of the era, to the point of rendering much of the text obscure in the extreme to the non-contemporary reader)(75). The motif which determines the structure of the 'novel' (Jarry sub-titles it a 'roman néo-scientifique' - perhaps meaning to imply the several senses of the word 'roman') is that of the "périple" - "de Paris à Paris par mer" - of Dr Faustroll through the earthly ocean of literature and the arts, of the sciences, of theology and of metaphysics. The idea of the "périple" or

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(*) It was seen in an earlier chapter (cf. chapter 5, supra) how this critique of the pretensions of science to a knowledge of reality becomes, amongst some symbolist writers, one of the starting-points for the development of a solipsistic outlook. Into this perspective Jarry fits perfectly.

journey is probably taken from Rabelais, a life-long subject of admiration and source of inspiration for Jarry(76). But the theme of an imaginary voyage - or of a voyage through the realms of the imagination - is frequent in Jarry; and Faustroll in fact navigates through a world made up of creations of the imagination: he has between his feet in the skiff a small number of works of literature or art, described as "les vingt-sept plus excellentes quintessences d'oeuvres qu'aient rapportées les gens curieux de leurs voyages"(77).

The work was clearly completed in 1898 (chapter one opens with the bailiff's statement: "L'an mil huit cent quatre-vingt-dix-huit...", and the second chapter with the words: "Le docteur Faustroll naquit en Circassie, en 1898"), chapters 6 and 10-25 appearing in the Mercure de France in May 1898 (Jarry was then aged 24). However, certain fragments of the work - Book II: Eléments de Pataphysique, and the concluding chapters: "Selon Ibicrate le Géomètre", "Pantaphysique [sic] et Catachimie", and "De la Surface de Dieu" - are considerably older, probably going back at least to 1894, when Jarry was 20-21 years old! It seems that Jarry first thought of writing an 'abstract' or 'theoretical' treatise on pataphysics; it was announced on the back of the second title-page of Les Minutes de sable mémorial, published in 1894, along with the forthcoming appearance of César-Antéchrist: "On prépare: ELEMENTS DE PATAPHYSIQUE"(78). Why he abandoned this idea is not certain; possibly because he came to realise that the invention of a personage such as Dr Faustroll conveyed the exact spirit of pataphysics far more effectively than any abstract presentation(*). What is

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(*) Cf. the opening lines of Jarry's portrait of Faustroll: / Cont.

certain is that Faustroll is far more truly and fundamentally Jarry himself than the mindless monster Ubu. Ubu is a mask, a rôle adopted by Jarry; but such a rôle constitutes an alienation from his real self. Faustroll, too, is in part a rôle; but (as we shall see) he represents the very essence of the mind of Jarry. This identity is hinted at broadly several times by Jarry in the course of Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll. The name 'Faustroll' is clearly made up of Faust and troll, a goblin or imp - Jarry himself having appeared as king of the trolls in Lugné-Poe's production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896. Moreover, amongst the objects seized by the bailiff Panmuphle [sic] in chapter 4, there is "un portrait du sieur Faustroll par AUBREY BEARDSLEY" - Beardsley had painted a portrait of Jarry, now unfortunately lost. Whilst chapter 9 of the work - "Faustroll plus petit que Faustroll" - opens with the cryptic statement: "Le docteur Faustroll (si l'on nous permet de parler d'expérience personnelle)...".

Nevertheless, the work does contain a theoretical outline of Jarry's new 'science'. In Book II, Eléments de Pataphysique, the eighth chapter, entitled "Définition", begins:

Cont. from previous page:
/ "Le docteur Faustroll naquit en Circassie, en 1898 (le XXe siècle avait (-2) ans), et à l'âge de soixante-trois ans.
A cet âge-là, lequel il conserva toute sa vie, le docteur Faustroll était un homme de taille moyenne, soit, pour être exactement véridique, de $(8\times10^{10}+10^{9}+4\times10^{8}+5\times10^{6})$ diamètres d'atomes; de peau jaune d'or, au visage glabre, sauf une moustache [sic] vert de mer, telles que les portait le roi Saleh; les cheveux alternativement, poil par poil, blond cendré et très noir, ambiguïté auburnienne changeante avec l'heure du soleil; les yeux, deux capsules de simple encre à écrire, préparée comme l'eau-de-vie de Dantzick, avec des spermatozoïdes d'or dedans." (Oeuvres complètes, I, p. 201.)

> Un épiphénomène est ce qui se surajoute à un phénomène.
>
> La pataphysique, dont l'étymologie doit s'écrire épi (metà tà physikà) et l'orthographe réelle 'pataphysique précédé d'une apostrophe, afin d'éviter un facile calembour, est la science de ce qui se surajoute à la métaphysique, soit en elle-même, soit hors d'elle-même, s'étendant aussi loin au-delà de celle-ci que celle-ci au-delà de la physique. Ex.: l'épiphénomène étant souvent l'accident, la pataphysique sera surtout la science du particulier, quoiqu'on dise qu'il n'y a de science que du général. Elle étudiera les lois qui régissent les exceptions et expliquera l'univers supplémentaire à celui-ci; ou moins ambitieusement décrira un univers que l'on peut voir et que peut-être l'on doit voir à la place du traditionnel, les lois que l'on a cru découvrir de l'univers traditionnel étant des corrélations d'exceptions aussi, quoique plus fréquentes, en tous cas de faits accidentels qui, se réduisant à des exceptions peu exceptionnelles, n'ont même pas l'attrait de la singularité.
>
> DÉFINITION. - La pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité. (79)

The passage begins on an apparently serious note; but immediately the reader is cautioned, by the reference to a 'facile pun' (that is, "patte à physique"), against a too 'serious' appreciation of what follows. Pataphysics, then, is "la science de ce qui se surajoute à la métaphysique"; but what is metaphysics? Jarry will go on to assert the lack of contact with'reality' of physics; therefore, if metaphysics extends beyond physics, and pataphysics as far beyond this as it extends beyond physics, then the realms of imaginative speculation, divorced from 'reality', are boundless! And Jarry's definition of pataphysics, or at least one of his definitions, is precisely this: it is the 'science of imaginary solutions'. Taking up implicitly, once again, the Kantian distinction between the 'thing-in-itself' (the "virtualité" of objects), which is unknowable, and the 'phenomenon' (the "linéaments" of objects), Jarry declares all propositions concerning the 'reality' of things - whether of a metaphysical,

theological, scientific or any other order - to be purely 'imaginary'. But pataphysics, by 'symbolically' attributing to the phenomenon the properties of the 'thing-in-itself', both legitimizes and at the same time considers as equally valid all such propositions or 'solutions'.

But pataphysics is also "la science du particulier" - a reminder of Jarry's 'anarchical' view of the world. Rejecting all 'laws', and with them (on an ethical and philosophical plane) all norms, standards and values, pataphysics will concern itself solely with the particular and the exceptional, treating all 'phenomena' as purely 'accidental' or 'epiphenomena'.

Several important ideas lie behind this piece of apparent mystification. As was seen in an earlier chapter, the view that science deals not in literal descriptions of reality but in abstract representations and symbols, was by the 1890's in France fairly well-known. Also current was the idea that the progress of science, far from producing an ever more accurate schéma of reality, was in fact leading further and further away from reality into a realm of pure abstraction(*). At the same time, the idea was gradually dawning that the scientist, in constructing his model of reality, in fact selects facts and events out of the totality

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(*) Cf. Brunetière's citation of a Christian apologist, Jules Payot (De la Croyance, Paris, 1896): "Ma science n'empêche point mon ignorance de la réalité d'être absolue... Langage symbolique, admirable système de signes, plus la science progresse, plus elle s'éloigne de la réalité pour s'enfoncer dans l'abstraction." ('Les Bases de la croyance', Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 Oct. 1896, p. 880. The italics are presumably Brunetière's.) Brunetière himself was quoted in an earlier chapter as proclaiming in the same article the total inability of 'science' to guarantee not only the reality, but the very 'existence' of an external world! (ibid., p. 882.)

of events or of phenomena constituting the universe, and in this way imposes his own - often seemingly arbitrary - interpretation upon these events(*). The arbitrariness of such interpretations is the point which Jarry seems to be trying to make in such a passage as the following:

> Au lieu d'énoncer la loi de la chute des corps vers un centre, que ne préfère-t-on celle de l'ascension du vide vers une périphérie, le vide étant pris pour unité de non-densité, hypothèse beaucoup moins arbitraire que le choix de l'unité concrète de densité positive eau? (80)

Similarly, the 'laws' of science are the invention of the scientist, existing only in his mind: "les lois que l'on a cru découvrir de l'univers traditionnel" are but "des corrélations d'exceptions [...] de faits accidentels". And the whole body of scientific knowledge represents an attempt to link together, in an ever widening synthesis or network of 'laws' and 'explanations', events and phenomena initially isolated and selected by the scientist from the totality of experience.

Thus far Jarry's pataphysics may seem to be a salutary, if somewhat perverse, statement of a truth universally accepted by the science of the twentieth century. But he immediately passes from one extreme to the other; instead of accepting the view to which Henri Poincaré will give the name of le commodisme - the 'explanations' of science are merely the most 'convenient' and most 'probable' representat-

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(*) A similar point of view was argued by Bergson, following his separation of man's psychic functions into 'intuition' and 'intellect': intellect, through its instrument of analysis, dissects, breaks up, 'spatializes' the raw material of experience into manageable 'quantities'; intellect is the instrument of science, by which it constructs its picture of reality in terms of quantitative numerical relationships.

ions of reality -, he declares all such explanations to be equally relative, equally arbitrary, equally 'absurd'. Far from being a new 'science' (Jarry is quite right when he states that "il n'y a de science que du général"), pataphysics is an attempt to dislocate science (and beyond that, metaphysics, theology and all else), to effect a reductio ad absurdum of all things.

In part, Jarry's rejection of science appears to be based on a rejection of the principle of induction, upon which is founded also (in his view) the concept of 'universal consent' - which in turn is nothing but a simple prejudice:

> La science actuelle se fonde sur le principe de l'induction: la plupart des hommes ont vu le plus souvent tel phénomène précéder ou suivre tel autre, et en concluent qu'il en sera toujours ainsi. (81)

He rejects equally the evidence of the senses; the 'knowledge' revealed by or acquired through the senses is entirely relative. Moreover, as he puts it in Les Jours et les nuits, "l'organe des sens étant une cause d'erreur, l'instrument scientifique amplifie les sens dans la direction de l'erreur". And in Faustroll, speaking of notions of attraction and repulsion of bodies, Jarry claims that the very concept of a 'body' is

> un postulat et un point de vue des sens de la foule, et pour que sinon sa nature au moins ses qualités ne varient pas trop, il est nécessaire de postuler que la taille des hommes restera toujours sensiblement constante et mutuellement égale. Le consentement universel est déjà un préjugé bien miraculeux et incompréhensible. (82)(*)

(*) Cf. supra, chapter V, for further examples of a similar view. One (hostile) critic in particular, quoted above, writes in 1898 that: "C'est, à l'heure qu'il est, une doctrine à peu près classique, que le témoignage des sens est trompeur; que la réalité ne ressemble en rien au monde que nous révèlent nos sens." And the same writer maintains - perhaps with some exaggeration, but in terms reminiscent of Jarry - that the doctrine according to which "les corps eux-mêmes, tels que nous les concevons, sont de pures apparences" is now "généralement affirmée comme un dogme. Ce dogme est enseigné à peu près dans tous les lycées de France."

And in the following chapter - "Faustroll plus petit que Faustroll" - Jarry proceeds to give an apparent demonstration of this relativity of knowledge to the senses - and, in this case, to the physical dimensions of the observer:

> Le docteur Faustroll [...] se voulut un jour plus petit que soi-même, et résolut d'aller explorer l'un des éléments, afin d'examiner quelles perturbations cette différence de grandeur apporterait dans leurs rapports réciproques. (83)

This example is in fact borrowed directly from an address given by an eminent scientist of the day, Sir William Crookes - to whom the chapter is dedicated -, to the Society for Psychical Research in London, a translation of which appeared in the Revue scientifique in Paris in May 1897. Crookes wishes likewise to convince his audience of the relativity of all knowledge, and to this end sets out to demonstrate the change that would appear to take place in the laws of the universe as a result of a simple change in the size of the observer. For this purpose, he invents a minuscule human being, a 'homunculus', whom he places in the middle of a cabbage-leaf covered with drops of dew - where amongst other things, according to Crookes, he will have great difficulty in retaining his belief in the universality of the law of gravity. And Crookes concludes:

> Cette science dont nous sommes fiers, n'est-elle pas simplement conditionnée par les circonstances accidentelles, ne comprend-elle pas une grande part de subjectivité [...]? (84)

A similar conclusion is reached, or demonstrated, by Faustroll; whilst in chapter 29 of the work - "De quelques significations plus évidentes des paroles Ha! ha!" - the argument reaches a new level in the suggestion that all knowledge - and consequently all conceptions of reality - is dependent upon, and perhaps no more than a creation of, language. Faustroll's

monkey-faced companion,Bosse-de-Nage, being capable of uttering only two words, "n'avait évidemment aucune notion de la sainte Trinité, ni de toutes les choses triples, ni de l'indéfini, qui commence à trois, ni de l'inconditionné, ni de l'Univers, qui peut être défini le Plusieurs"(85).

Yet Jarry does not really attempt to engage battle head on, to refute the claims of 'science' on its own grounds of logic - despite appearances to the contrary. The method of apparent logical demonstration is abandoned, and the very arguments he appears to advance are undermined by Jarry. In chapter 8, for example, the effect of the diatribe against "les sens de la foule" and the prejudice of 'universal consent' is largely cancelled out by the fanciful examples he adduces in support of his argument: for all that 'the mob' is incapable of perceiving ellipses, nonetheless "les bourgeois mêmes conservent leur vin dans des tonneaux et non dans des cylindres"!(86) And this whole Crookesian argument is placed explicitly under the heading, not of a 'scientific' or logical rebuttal of 'science', but of pataphysics: Faustroll's demonstration is that of one of "[les] adeptes de la science pataphysique"(87). The reason is evident enough: after all, who is trying to demonstrate the relativity of the human view of the universe, who tries to outline a possible non-human vision of this universe but... a human being? The demonstration is 'rigged' from the start: everything is relative to the human viewpoint, even demonstrations of its relativity. The human mind is trapped in a vicious circle, and nowhere can a foothold in 'reality' be found. Hence the whole argument is reduced to absurdity, but by an 'absurd' logic which

characterizes the whole of Jarry's life and work(*).

But what is the point of this pataphysical demonstration - and of the whole 'science' of pataphysics elaborated by Jarry? How seriously are we to take the reference to "l'univers supplémentaire à celui-ci" which pataphysics is to explain - or at least "l'univers que l'on peut voir et que peut-être l'on doit voir à la place du traditionnel" which pataphysics will describe? Once again, Jarry's 'absurd' logic would seem to cancel out an apparently positive statement: given that everything is exception, science has the disadvantage that it deals with - and the traditional picture of the universe the disadvantage that it envisages - merely unexceptional exceptions, which, because they are unexceptional, are not even interesting! Yet the point deserves further investigation, in the light of the above-quoted views of Jarry's 'mystical' or 'transcendental' aims. The case is put most coherently by Shattuck, who argues that: "Behind

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(*) There are a number of other chapters of Faustroll, also, in which Jarry (or Faustroll) applies the methods of pataphysics to scientific matters (e.g. ch. 6, "Du bateau du docteur, qui est un crible"; ch. 37, "De la règle de mesure, de la montre et du diapason"; and ch. 38, "Du soleil, solide froid"). In all of these, much, if not all, of the scientific material is drawn from actual scientific texts which appeared in the years immediately preceding the writing of Faustroll. The debt to Sir William Crookes in chapter 9 has already been noted; in ch. 6, also, the second paragraph is a paraphrase from this same address by Crookes. And in the same chapter, the whole of the theoretical material (though not, of course, its application!) relating to capillarity, surface tension, the floating sieve, the quartz thread, and other notions, is borrowed directly from Soap Bubbles and the Forces which mould them (London, 1890; Fr. trans. 1892) by the English physicist C. V. Boys (to whom the chapter is appropriately dedicated). Finally, the material of chapters 37 and 38 - the two 'telepathic letters' from Faustroll to Lord Kelvin - is in fact drawn from Kelvin's Popular Lectures and Addresses, vol. I: Constitution of Matter (2nd ed. London, 1891; Fr. trans. 1893). All this material, however, is interpreted and treated by Jarry 'pataphysically' - often, for example, by deliberately adhering to the letter of the original at the expense of the spirit or meaning. (Details from Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 22-23, special issue devoted to an elucidation of Faustroll.)

the double-talk, Jarry is aiming not merely at the limit, but beyond the limit of man's conceptual powers, and this without ever abandoning the pretence of reason."(88) Certainly, Jarry never abandons the pretence of reason; but whether his aim is any more positive or constructive than we have seen it to be up to this point, is another matter. Considerable light is thrown on the question by an examination of the final book of Faustroll, in which science, metaphysics and theology all fuse.

The book is entitled, significantly, Éthernité; and by thus fusing in one word the scientific and the metaphysical, Jarry is able to go on to perform a physio-chemical analysis of the 'dimension' in question. And should the reader still be unaware of the nature of the demonstration which will follow, he is warned by the following epigraph, supposedly from one 'François Bacon':

> Leves gustus ad philosophiam movere fortasse ad atheismum, sed pleniores haustus ad religionem reducere.(*)

After the two 'telepathic letters' to Lord Kelvin, a chapter entitled "Selon Ibicrate le Géomètre" introduces us to fragments of the pataphysical teachings of Ibicrate's 'divine master', Sophrotatos the Armenian. The chapter re-echoes many of the themes of César-Antéchrist, and was very probably written about the same time: theological quantities and metaphysical concepts are reduced to heraldic and mathematical symbols, thereby neatly cancelling each other out to produce: zero. The crowning point of the whole work, however,

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(*) English translation (from Selected Works of Alfred Jarry, ed. S. Watson Taylor and R. Shattuck, Notes, p. 274: "A light sip will incline one to philosophy, possibly to atheism, but a fuller draught will lead one back to religion."

is the final chapter: "De la Surface de Dieu". Just as Jarry, by writing "éthernité", was able to perform a physio-chemical analysis of the same, so by supposing 'God' to have a certain number of 'dimensions' he is able to calculate 'the surface of God':

> Dieu est par définition inétendu, mais il nous est permis, pour la clarté de notre énoncé, de lui supposer un nombre quelconque, plus grand que zéro, de dimensions, bien qu'il n'en ait aucune, si ces dimensions disparaissent dans les deux membres de nos identités. (89)

And by means of a fantastical and beautifully pataphysical mathematical development, in which algebraic deductions are verified by reference to the lurid visions of Anne-Catherine Emmerich (an illiterate and hysterical Christian mystical fantasist who was well-known around the end of the nineteenth century), Jarry arrives at the following 'definition':

> DÉFINITION. - Dieu est le plus court chemin de zéro à l'infini.
>
> Dans quel sens? dira-t-on.
>
> - Nous répondrons que Son prénom n'est pas Jules, mais Plus-et-Moins. Et l'on doit dire:
>
> ± Dieu est le plus court chemin de 0 à ∞, dans un sens ou dans l'autre.

And finally:

> Donc, définitivement:
> DIEU EST LE POINT TANGENT DE ZÉRO ET DE L'INFINI.
> La Pataphysique est la science... (90)(*)

(*) A similar (though often less entertaining) example of Jarry's treatment of the realities or ideas of the world in which he lived can be found in his numerous 'chroniques' - Spéculations, Gestes, Le Périple de la littérature et de l'art, Fantaisies parisiennes, and others. Jarry writes on a vast range of subjects - hunting, the army, the railways, horse-racing, fishing, politics, murders and other crimes, road accidents, fashions, theatre, the circus, medicine, alcohol, etc., etc. Everywhere (except perhaps in his literary tributes) he attempts to stand the values and standards of this world on their head. Thus in one of his Gestes he asks innocently why it is that one should place the things of the mind - that is, of the brain - above the activities or secretions of other bodily organs (O.C., VII, p. 47). Posing as the perfect /

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The true nature of Jarry's 'science' of pataphysics (where it is not simply a huge private joke) should be clear. The 'universe supplementary to this one' is not a 'mystical' or 'transcendental' one, but merely the universe of Jarry's own private fantasies and dreams - whose autonomy the weapon of pataphysics, with its absurd logic, is designed to protect from the encroachments of a hostile outside world. Pataphysics constitutes a system, or a method, by which Jarry attempts to dislocate normal logic, to reduce to absurdity the 'reality' of everyday existence and the 'truths' of science, of philosophy, of theology - or indeed any proposition which claims to express a truth of any kind. Pataphysics is an anti-science, an anti-logic, an anti-philosophy. This is the 'fine new construction' which will yet more effectively sweep away the old.

It is no mere coincidence that the chapter of Faustroll in which the reader is introduced to Faustroll's companion, Bosse-de-Nage (chapter 10: "Du grand singe papion Bosse-de-Nage, lequel ne savait de parole humaine que:"Ha! Ha!""), is not situated in Book I, in which the other chief characters of the work are introduced, but constitutes the third and final chapter of Book II, Éléments de Pataphysique. That is to say, it comes immediately after the 'theoretical' outline of pataphysics and the arguments seemingly put forward in

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/ anarchist, he writes of forgery: "nous avons esquissé une théorie de la fabrication de la monnaie fiduciaire en libre-concurrence, opération dite irrévérencieusement par l'Etat faux-monnayage quand il ne la perpètre pas lui-même" (O.C., VII, p. 42). On a somewhat more lugubrious note, he praises fatal traffic accidents for the contribution they make to the problem of over-population: "Les accidents de métro, chemins de fer, tramways, etc., ont ceci de bon, comme les guerres, qu'ils éclaircissent le trop-plein misérable de la population." (O.C., /

(Carried over to following page.)

favour of the 'pataphysical' as against the 'scientific' point of view, apparently as a final comment upon these. Moreover, the monkey's sole utterance continues to play an analogous rôle throughout the novel. The final wisdom of pataphysics is that the ultimate 'answer' to all questions is simply: 'Ha! Ha!'.

(v) God, Hallucination, Absinthe and Freedom.

The above comments upon Faustroll, however, in no way exhaust Jarry's treatment of the idea of 'God'. In fact he takes up certain of the mystical and occultist concepts current in symbolist milieux, but in each case giving them his own characteristic twist. (The contemporary critic Fagus might perhaps be forgiven for believing that in L'Amour absolu he actually saw Jarry discovering himself 'mathematically' to be God, "Dieu, fils de la Vierge"!(91))

One such concept is that of the artist-creator 'becoming God' through his creation of a world. Jarry certainly toys with the idea, and equally certainly puts forward the claim

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/ VII, p. 102). And elsewhere he even writes an apology of murder, attributing its condemnation merely to 'fashion'; in the utopian society of the future, on the other hand, "les délits ou les bonnes actions ne seront [...] que différentes manières de vivre des honnêtes gens. Ainsi, on dira, pour la commodité du langage et pour éviter de faciles confusions: 'M. X..., l'honnête homme qui a fondé un prix de vertu; M. Y..., l'honnête homme qui a assassiné une vieille dame'." (O.C., VII.) One is reminded of Camus' claim that the only real ethical problem is that of murder; where human life no longer has any value, nothing has any value.

Much of this, of course, falls within a certain tradition of chronicle-writing, and many of Jarry's chronicles count as little more than an attempt at wry humour (many of his contemporaries in fact saw in him merely a humorist and farceur); but his 'pataphysical' intention of disrupting and distorting the vision of his contemporaries, of standing the values of the world on their head, is everywhere apparent.

to be 'God'. Of the élite to which Sengle belongs, for example, we read in the semi-autobiographical Les Jours et les nuits:

> Ceux dont l'intelligence et le corps sont élus, à moins d'imprévu détraquement, se laissent aller dans la gravitation de leurs actes autour de leur synthèse intérieure, et ne désobéissent à aucune prescription du Décalogue, respectant en Dieu soi [...]. "Dieu en vain tu ne jureras" est la seule courtoisie valable; il est ridicule de cracher sur son miroir, même l'inspectant par des besicles grossissantes. (92)

In L'Amour absolu, Emmanuel Dieu - as the name implies - is "un homme dans le genre de Dieu"(93). He is at one and the same time man and God, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit, son, husband and lover of Maria (or Varia) who is in return simultaneously his mistress, his wife, his mother and the Virgin (the Mother of God) - an identity which Emmanuel expresses thus:

> Femme, il y a un seul Dieu en trois personnes, je suis un seul Dieu en trois personnes... Je suis le Fils, je suis ton fils, je suis l'Esprit, je suis ton mari de toute éternité, ton mari et ton fils, très pure Jocaste! (94)

While Faustroll could not be more explicit: to the question of the figure representing the bizarrely Christian painter Emile Bernard: "Etes-vous chrétiens?", Faustroll replies simply: "Je suis Dieu"(95).

Faustroll indeed is 'God' - as is Jarry, too, through his identification with Sengle, Emmanuel Dieu, and above all Faustroll. God is creator; it is in fact by virtue of his creation of a world, a world governed by his own logic, that he is God. God is absolute freedom - an absolute freedom that can only be maintained by the exercise of an absolute tyranny with regard to this world he has created, including the power of its destruction. Indeed, one might even say

that God is the perfect nihilist: totally free and undetermined, acknowledging no authority outside of his own, holding in his hands the power of life and death on a cosmic scale to exercise according to his own will, or whims. And Jarry-Faustroll is also God by virtue of his creation of a world - according to the principles of pataphysics: a world governed by his own 'logic', a world which is his own 'dream', as the world is an 'idea' or a 'dream' in the mind of God. But here paradox gives way to further paradox. None of these divine 'absolutes' of freedom and tyranny can exist 'in reality'; therefore they must exist in ... the imagination! The artist-God will therefore withdraw from the world into himself, exercising and enjoying this freedom and tyranny within his own 'imagination'. Whence the words of César-Antéchrist:

> Je suis César il est vrai, non des hommes que je méprise et pour qui je ne veux user les courts moments de mon séjour terrestre, mais de l'Univers et de l'Absolu, car, grâce à cet oubli mon esclave, ce que je veux existe ou n'existe pas selon qu'il me plaît. [...] Je suis l'Orgueil absolu parce que je suis la Force suprême; et c'est pourquoi je ne dominerai pas, car ma domination ne serait pas comprise (laissons cela aux faux Césars), et aussi tout ce qui est moi est un élixir précieux qui ne doit pas être follement perdu. (96)

In contrast to certain of his symbolist contemporaries, however, Jarry's own 'culte du moi' does not involve any quest for a hidden 'self', mystical, metaphysical or of any other kind(97). It does not involve, in fact, a 'quest' for anything at all. There is merely a <u>creation</u> of Jarry's own 'absurd', 'imaginary', purely gratuitous 'truth' and 'reality'. The name Faustroll provides an essential clue here. The 'troll' (a goblin or imp) implies, it has been suggested, that Faustroll is "the imp of science"(98); but the name also

conjures up an image of a Faust striving for knowledge, stood on his head, or turned inside out. Jarry's Faustroll does not strive to discover knowledge and truth; he invents them. And Jarry is satisfied with the cultivation of his own dreams.

What spiritual values, if any at all, remain for Jarry? It has been suggested that "Jarry found his means of spiritual elevation in drink"(99) - which no doubt is one way of putting it. God is replaced by absinthe, and theology becomes an apology for alcohol. Jarry's defence of drink is justly famous. In reply to an article by Emile Faguet, for instance, he writes:

> Quand ne sera-t-il plus besoin de rappeler que les anti-alcooliques sont des malades en proie à ce poison, l'eau, si dissolvant et corrosif qu'on l'a choisi entre toutes substances pour les ablutions et lessives, et qu'une goutte versée dans un liquide pur, l'absinthe par exemple, le trouble? (100)

And elsewhere:

> Nous pensions en avoir fini avec la question de l'alcoolisme, et que toute personne sensée avait compris que l'usage, et à plus forte raison l'abus, des boissons fermentées était ce qui distinguait l'homme de la bête. (101)

Whilst a direct link between 'God' and alcohol is established in Jarry's last (uncompleted) novel, La Dragonne, written at a time when his devotion to drink was becoming more and more exclusive. The starting-point of the passage in question is found in the declaration: "Et maintenant, Dieu n'est pas, et l'homme est l'être humain...".(*) From this, through

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(*) A whole regiment of an army has been led, due to a brilliant piece of military engineering on the part of the hero of the novel, Sacqueville, to annihilate itself. Towards the end of the chapter, Sacqueville comes face to face with the sole remaining survivor of the battle, the last of the 'enemy' - the regimental chaplain. The phrase above, spoken by /

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punning on the word 'Spirit', Jarry proceeds to expound a piece of alcoholic theology which is on a par with the best of his writings:

> Au commencement, l'Esprit de Dieu flottait sur les eaux [...]. Mais il n'y a point de Père, sinon dans l'Esprit; le Père est soluble dans l'Esprit: l'Esprit est l'Arche du Père sur les eaux [...]. L'Esprit est ce Dieu futur et éternel, le même qui engrosse les vierges et qui, au commencement, flottait et sous l'espèce de qui l'homme communiera, quand il n'y aura plus besoin de communion, ou que Dieu, resté en arrière, communiera de l'homme [...] dès que l'homme aura "battu le record" de Dieu. (102)

But Jarry's use of alcohol also has a more serious 'application'; it is directly related to his cultivation of dream and hallucination. The antagonism which the symbolists (following Baudelaire) felt to exist between 'dream', on the one hand, and 'action' (or 'reality', or 'life') on the other, is a well-known subject. To this problem Jarry provides his own very special solution - a clue to which

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Continued from previous page:
/ Sacqueville, precedes the long, wandering discourse by the abbé, quoted subsequently, on "l'Esprit". And immediately before the abbé himself is slain by Sacqueville, there is this brief passage: "L'abbé le contempla avec des yeux qui s'égaraient, ne cria point, car sa voix s'étrangla. Sacqueville crut percevoir, au fond de sa gorge, les deux mots hébreux qui expriment: Dieu est mort!" (O.C., V, p. 115)

Is Jarry here echoing Nietzsche's famous cry? It is possible that an influence of Nietzsche on Jarry exists: at the Lycée de Rennes from 1889 to 1890, Jarry heard the ideas of Nietzsche expounded by Professor B. Bourdon, before Nietzsche's works were translated into French (Cf. the text Albert Samain, O.C., VII, p. 320). But the evidence is inconclusive, and in any case the idea of 'the death of God' was very much 'in the air' at the time, and did not need to await Nietzsche to give it currency.

Of Jarry's relationship to the Christian faith, the following can be said with a fair measure of certainty. There can be no doubt that he was not a 'believer', in any ordinary sense of the word, in the Catholic faith of his boyhood. It is impossible to say when this faith was lost, however, although from the time of Jarry's earliest surviving texts onwards there is no trace of any allegiance to Catholic belief. But lost faith did not give way to indifference, and religious themes and motifs continue to appear in Jarry's work - though always in the same curiously facetious or inverted manner, the treatment being consistently and exclusively 'pataphysical'.

can be found in Les Jours et les nuits. Not only does Sengle desert reality each night, escaping into a world of dream; he also attempts to make the day indistinguishable from night by means of prolonging his dream into the day and making of the day - or 'reality' - a perpetual hallucination. He seeks to make day and night fuse into a continuum of dream or hallucination, reaching a state in which

> il ne distinguait pas du tout sa pensée de ses actes ni son rêve de sa veille; et perfectionnant la leibnizienne définition, que la perception est une hallucination vraie, il ne voyait pas pourquoi ne pas dire: l'hallucination est une perception fausse, ou plus exactement: faible, ou tout à fait mieux: prévue (souvenue quelquefois, ce qui est la même chose). Et il pensait surtout qu'il n'y a que des hallucinations ou que des perceptions, et qu'il n'y a ni nuits ni jours (malgré le titre de ce livre, ce qui fait qu'on l'a choisi), et que la vie est continue [...]. (103)(*)

The argument is of course carried by Jarry to the point of absurdity (the tone of spoofing puts us on our guard), but the theme of dream and reality - or night and day - fusing

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(*) Has Jarry got his philosophers mixed up in attributing to Leibniz the view "que la perception est une hallucination vraie"? It was Taine who stated in the preface to De l'intelligence (1870) his intention of regarding "la perception extérieure [...] comme une hallucination véridique" (tome I, Préface, p. 6). It was seen in an earlier chapter how this statement was seized upon out of context by certain of the symbolists and contributed to their solipsistic view of the world. Jarry's formulation of the idea may well owe its direct origins to Gourmont's Sixtine, whose hero, d'Entragues, believes he is able to give the illusion of even physical reality to the creations of his own imagination. Addressing himself to his beloved, Sixtine, he declares: "J'ai de particulières facultés de vision et maintes fois je vous [Sixtine] appelai près de moi par des magies. L'objet auquel je pense très fortement s'incorpore devant mes yeux en une forme visible, et à mes sens tactiles en une palpable matérialité, quelquefois. J'ai senti des présences de personnes certainement bien loin de moi, selon le commun jugement, et cela ne m'étonne point, car la sensation régulière n'est qu'une hallucination vraie. Vraie ou fausse, pour moi, cela est bien indifférent, et je ne m'en inquiète guère." (Sixtine, Mercure de France, 1918 ed., p. 66. My italics.) Gourmont also refers to "la sensation" as "une hallucination vraie" - attributing the view this time explicitly to Taine - in his Promenades philosophiques (Mercure de France, 1963, I, p. 84.).

into a continuum of perpetual hallucination runs through the whole novel, and it seems to have been also the state of mind which Jarry himself consistently sought to maintain in his own life. Sengle makes use of various drugs - hashish, in particular, it seems (although the point is not very clear in the novel) - in order to effect this transformation of reality into a state of perpetual hallucination; although he seems in fact to have less need of artificial stimulants than others, "l'état de haschisch" being "semblable à son état normal"(104).(*)

Whether Jarry himself regularly used hallucination-producing drugs is uncertain, although he definitely experimented with them at least. What is certain is that he made copious use of alcohol in order to help maintain himself in a state of perpetual hallucination, or semi-hallucination. Once again, we are brought back to pataphysics as the clue to Jarry's life and works; it is no accident that the passage quoted above from Les Jours et les nuits occurs in a chapter entitled, precisely, 'Pataphysics'. Pataphysics aims at the destruction, or dislocation, of existing 'reality'; and through Jarry's attempt to make of life a perpetually sustained hallucination, the supposed 'reality' of life is swallowed up by the deliberately cultivated unreality of dream. Such is Jarry's 'solution' to the problem of the

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(*) The idea of a state of hallucination acceded to by the use of drugs forms the subject of another work of Jarry, Le Vieux de la Montagne, based on the legend of the leader of the 'Assassins' or 'Hashishins', who administered to his men a drug made from hemp which put them into a state of ecstasy (giving them the illusion of being in Paradise) and of absolute obedience - they being ready to commit murder for their master. The work brings together, in a poetic fantasy, several important themes of Jarry's work - in particular those of hallucination, death and murder.

antagonism between dream and reality(*).

Yet once again we are brought face to face with the ultimate question concerning Jarry: why? all this, in the name of what? The answer would seem to be simply: in the name of his own total (or as near to total as possible) individual freedom. Romantic as such an interpretation sounds, it does fit in with the known character of this intensely proud yet timid, uncompromising little man, and there is evidence pointing towards it. To return for a moment to the radical, solipsistic dualism of 'the self' and 'the world': it is by the negation of the latter, by the denial of the reality and of the claims of the external world, that the former is affirmed - and given the illusion of absolute freedom. The process can be seen in the aesthetic theorizing of certain of the symbolists: their 'idealism', by tending to deny the reality of the external world, sets the 'self' at the centre of all things as a free or autonomous creative agent. And just as in Jarry, the sense of the unreality of the world is heightened by the use of alcohol, so too it is alcohol which provides a clue to his intentions here.

Turning to Jarry's biographers, we find that Dr Saltas speaks of 'alcoholism' in the last years of Jarry's life,

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(*) Shattuck proposes a different interpretation of Jarry's cultivation of hallucination: "Only new construction can ultimately replace the old. Beyond Jarry's nihilism there is a positive side to his work. [...] A single facet of his work does not represent Jarry as an author and fails to show his desperate effort to renovate human sensibility. His method of hallucination constitutes an attempt to destroy and to create simultaneously: to transform." (The Banquet Years, p. 176). But such an interpretation seems quite gratuitous. There is no evidence whatsoever to show even a preoccupation on the part of Jarry with "renovating human sensibility", let alone a "desperate effort".

while Rachilde describes him as "toujours ivre d'un mauvais alcool ou d'un trop beau rêve"(105); and elsewhere she refers to "cet état d'ivresse permanente dans lequel il semblait trépider au lieu de vivre normalement"(106). Yet the biographers also insist upon the deliberateness and wilfulness of this drinking: Rachilde claims that Jarry "goûtait la joie du martyre en buvant de l'absinthe, sachant parfaitement qu'il se tuait"(107); and Charles Doury describes him as "apportant même [...] dans ses dérèglements, une discipline et des principes"(108). It would seem in the light of this that the wilfulness with which Jarry kept himself saturated with alcohol was not alcoholism, in the strict medical sense, but rather a gradual, protracted <u>suicide</u>. Even if this was not so (and the evidence suggests the contrary) up to 1906, when Jarry suffered a first, extremely serious breakdown, only narrowly escaping death, it must certainly have been the case thereafter. Following his return to Paris after this narrow escape, Jarry, knowing for certain now that he was killing himself, drank even more frantically than before, keeping himself saturated no longer with his beloved absinthe, which he was too poor to buy, but with ether - a fact which, sadly but ironically, reminds one of the "éthernité" of <u>Faustroll</u>. One of his last writings, a piece entitled "Descendit ad infernos" and destined to form part of the uncompleted <u>La Dragonne</u>, describes in visionary terms the hero's 'descent' towards death through wilful drinking:

> Mais bientôt il ne put boire davantage dans les ténèbres, car pour lui il n'y eut plus de ténèbres, et comme sans doute Adam avant la faute et à coup sûr les grands anthropomorphes, il voyait clair dans l'obscurité. (109)

Here we must open a brief parenthesis to examine the theme of death in the work of Jarry. It is in fact a constant theme, running through almost all of his works (outside of the Ubu cycle and his puppet theatre). J.-H. Sainmont claims that Jarry merely treats the idea of death 'pataphysically' - merely playing with it, using it merely as décor(*). This is certainly the case in Faustroll, the most explicitly 'pataphysical' of the works of Jarry. But it is difficult to subscribe to Sainmont's judgement in considering some of Jarry's other works. Maurice Saillet finds in Les Minutes de sable mémorial, his first published work, an 'obsession' with the idea of death; and one could say the same of other works, in particular the important L'Amour absolu, where the theme of death shares with that of love central place in the novel. The hero of the work is awaiting the coming of death: "Emmanuel Dieu attend l'heure sidérale que sa tête s'en aille."(110) And the final words of the work - addressed to no one particular interlocutor - are: "A présent, qui est l'heure de notre mort."(111)

The theme of death frequently takes the form of that of a man condemned to death - associated with the idea of murder. Emmanuel Dieu himself is condemned to death; he has killed - we are told -, but whom or what?

> Il habite une des branches de l'étoile de pierre.
> La prison de LA SANTÉ.
> Comme il est condamné à mort, la branche où se cataloguent les condamnés à mort. (112)

(*) Cf.: "Maintes fois Jarry y pensa. Il joua avec ces émois et ces colifichets-croquemitaines. Familièrement et familialement. La cérémonie le ravissait par toute la part de jeu et de faux qu'elle comprend [...]." (Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 10, p. 149).

The same theme occurs in Les Jours et les nuits: "Sengle libre est condamné à mort, et il sait la date."(113) Sengle, moreover, is the 'murderer' of his Double (thereby plunging himself into insanity). And the murderer theme occurs also in one of Jarry's earliest works, Haldernablou, based on his youthful relationship with Léon-Paul Fargue: the Duke Haldern kills his page Ablou, whom he loved, and who was also in a sense his 'double', a complement to himself.

Through these various semi-autobiographical 'heroes' (and most explicitly through Emmanuel Dieu), Jarry identifies himself with "les grands criminels et LES CONDAMNÉS À MORT"(114). It may well be that his work bears witness to a deliberate preoccupation with what was initially an involuntary obsession with the idea of death, designed to master consciously, and thus to exorcise, this obsession(*). This by two means: firstly, by playing with symbols of death in his life and work, as suggested by Sainmont; secondly, through the identification of death and dream.

The idea of such an identity occurs several times in his work. For example, it is put into the mouth of the abbé in La Dragonne:

> Nous, prêtres, avons catalogué en trois classes les vagabondages de la fantaisie des morts. Nous disciplons leurs rêves, qui sont le seul Autre Monde. La décomposition de leur cerveau organise l'Eternité.(115)

(And the abbé goes on to tell us that these dreams constitute Heaven, Hell or Purgatory "selon ce qu'on absorbe". Naturally it is alcohol which determines the entry into Paradise.)

(*) He may, at least in part, have succeeded in this aim, if such it was. All the witnesses to his death describe him as being calm and in good humour (his dying wish was to be given a tooth-pick!), certainly without anguish or any appearance of anguish.

And in a letter to Rachilde from Laval dated 28 May 1906, when Jarry believed himself to be at the point of death, he wrote:

> Là-dessus, le Père Ubu, qui n'a pas volé son repos, va essayer de dormir. Il croit que le cerveau, dans la décomposition, fonctionne au-delà de la mort, et que ce sont ses rêves qui sont le Paradis. (116)

Thus even death becomes a 'dream', and life, through its becoming a perpetual hallucination, passes imperceptibly into death. Once again, everything is absorbed into a continuum of unreality.

From the themes of death and the provocation of death, it is but a short step, in a mind such as that of Jarry, to that of universal annihilation - the dispensing of death on a cosmic scale. Visions of universal annihilation occur in both César-Antéchrist and Faustroll (though their presence in itself of course proves nothing: in the first they may be used simply as décor, and in the second the treatment is distinctly 'pataphysical'(*)). Of greater significance, however, is a chapter of La Dragonne entitled "La Bataille de Morsang"(**). Here, the hero, Sacqueville, by a brilliant

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(*) All the same, it may not be without significance that, of all the dedicacees of chapters in Faustroll, the only one to have his dedication qualified with an adjective is "Monsieur Deibler" - the then Public Executioner of France! The dedication reads: "A Monsieur Deibler, sympathiquement" (Jarry's italics).

(**) Although La Dragonne remained uncompleted and fragmentary at Jarry's death, this chapter, which forms the centre of the novel and whose magnificent, hallucinatory writing is amongst Jarry's best, was written some years before his death and published in the Revue Blanche in 1903. Subsequent changes to the text were few and insignificant. It is not certain whether, in the final conception of the novel, this scene would have been 'real' or a dream. But this is of no significance here: the chapter was originally conceived independently of the rest of the novel, and constitutes a complete episode in itself, and a vision which is complete in itself. (Details from Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 27 - special issue devoted to a study of La Dragonne.)

piece of military engineering, causes a whole regiment of an army to annihilate itself. Both this action, and the choice of the battlefield - on account of the name of a nearby village: Morsang -, are the result of a deliberate decision on the part of Sacqueville. And though the reasoning is 'pataphysical'(*), the fact of Sacqueville's twice being referred to as "l'Exterminateur", the hallucinatory style of writing, and the final confrontation with the abbé, the regimental chaplain, who ends his long speech in which God is replaced by a divinisation of alcohol with the words: "Or je vois à certains signes, certains, que c'est cette nuit-ci la fin des temps"(117) - all suggest that this scene is in fact a symbolic total annihilation of mankind - wherein Sacqueville-Jarry is, in dream or in 'reality', the deliberate and conscious agent of annihilation.

Through a total annihilation of Being, one becomes God(**). Sacqueville-Jarry, through this symbolic annihilation of the whole of mankind, equally symbolically 'becomes God'. Such an annihilation constitutes the ultimate affirmation of the 'self' and its freedom: the freedom to create, and to destroy totally, at will. But such an annihilation, and such a freedom, must forever remain a dream, a subject of fiction. Not so suicide.

(*) e.g. to explain Sacqueville's safety in the centre of the circular battlefield (the regiment being ranged around the circumference of a circle), by likening the spot to the calm at the centre of a cyclone: "Cyclone est cercle. La mort y est centrifuge. La mort est toujours centrifuge, ce qui explique l'inexplicable longévité de Dieu et de quelques hommes. Le cyclone est un trou avec de la mort autour." (O.C., V, p. 95).

(**) Cf. Jean Rostand: "Tuez un homme, vous êtes un assassin; tuez-en des millions, vous êtes un conquérant; tuez-les tous, vous êtes Dieu." (Cit. J.-H. Sainmont, Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 8, p. 27.)

Jarry's suicide through drink is in fact the ultimate (humanly possible) affirmation of freedom. Having destroyed all else, the only act left for him to perform is that of self-destruction; his attempt to destroy existing reality, thereby affirming his own total freedom, is extended even to a destruction of himself. The first stage in this destruction was Jarry's adoption of the rôle of Ubu, thereby doing violence to his own personality; the final stage was the denial, through his cultivation of drink, even of the claims of his own self (body and soul) to existence. The point is well expressed by Roger Shattuck:

> Ubu acknowledges no affections, no damnation; for him nothing is sacred, not even, as in Faust, the clutch of his own mind. A distorted image of Faust, Ubu-Jarry is engaged in the only act logically left for him to perform: self-destruction. Elevation by alcohol became his form of protracted suicide; yet while he was dying he was at liberty. No worldly restraint could touch him. [...] Through a prolonged suicide, Jarry clung to the moment of total freedom that precedes death. (118)

Such a freedom is, of course, a 'freedom of absurdity'. But where others attempt to flee this freedom and to find refuge in some new form of imagined 'enracinement' and compulsion, Jarry on the contrary accepts it to the full(*). His

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(*) Or does he? There are certain indications that, in the years immediately preceding his death, an evolution was taking place in Jarry away from his wholly negative standpoint and towards a new position. He began to make extravagant claims concerning noble ancestry, and to stress his Catholic-Breton origins (ideas summed up by Maurice Saillet as "sa nouvelle idéologie catholique-bretonne-pseudo-nobiliaire" (Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 27, p. 42)), moving clearly in the direction of a position of political and social reaction. Henry de Bruchard (in his Petits Mémoires du temps de la Ligue, Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1912, p. 53) even claims that Jarry, upon his return from Laval to Paris in 1906, after his narrow escape from death, told him of plans to become a 'reactionary' and 'antisemitic' polemicist.

It is impossible to know how 'serious' Jarry was in this. But if such an evolution did take place, it was at least as much the result of a deliberate (and, in a strictly logical

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system of pataphysics represents at one and the same time a consequence and an intention: it derives from a belief in the 'absurdity' of existence and the 'unreality' of the world; and it is also the transformation of this belief into an instrument designed to further negate, destroy and render 'absurd'. It is the product both of certain ideas current in the milieux in which, intellectually, Jarry lived, and of an act of will.

The latter fact brings us to the final realisation of the why? of Jarry. The extent and the single-mindedness of his revolt against the world in which he lived, and of his assault upon reality, are such that it is impossible not to see in this a certain 'maniacal' element. Psychologically, there is a strong suggestion of imbalance in Jarry affecting all his life and work. Yet the fact remains that he found the materials for his nihilistic vision of the world in the thought of his contemporaries. Its exact sources and consequences have been seen; it remains now to consider briefly the impact of this vision upon the nature of his literary work.

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/ sense, arbitrary) act of will as were the more extravagant developments of his pataphysics. Moreover, such an evolution would also have been a thoroughly typical one. Barrès' evolution from a position of extreme individualism to a reactionary nationalism has already been discussed. Whilst the whole team of writers grouped around the Mercure de France (with whom Jarry was closely associated), Gourmont at their head, follow a similar evolution from the would-be 'anarchism' of the early 1890's to the rabid and uncompromising nationalism of 1914.

(vi) The Nature of Art.

What type of literature can grow out of such a nihilistic standpoint? The question is important to a study of Jarry in a way which does not apply to the other writers studied to date. Lahor, Laforgue and Barrès, though their conceptions of literature and its function may differ, are united on one point: none of them calls into question the essential seriousness of the work upon which they are engaged. Not so Jarry. And although a thorough examination of this question would carry us too far afield, a few comments are highly relevant. In fact, the 'literature' produced by Jarry is of several different kinds; several tendencies co-exist in him, pulling him now in one direction, now in another - but all of them developments of ideas or trends to be found amongst his literary contemporaries.

First of all, literature, for Jarry, was a continuation and a capturing of his own dreams and fantasies. His cultivation of dream and hallucination has been discussed; and these dreams, or Jarry's private fantasies, recorded in written form, constitute an important part of his work. A passage in Les Jours et les nuits describes Sengle's ejaculatory manner of writing, which may well have been Jarry's own:

> Sengle construisait ses littératures, curieusement et précisément équilibrées, par des sommeils d'une quinzaine de bonnes heures, après manger et boire; et éjaculait en une écriture de quelque méchante demi-heure le résultat. (119)

This passage occurs in a chapter entitled "Pataphysique"; and this literature constitutes an element of Jarry's pataphysics, an element in the creation of a 'universe supplementary to

this one' (Faustroll's navigation, it will be recalled, was amidst a series of creations of the imagination, both scientific and philosophical, literary and artistic). A premium is placed by Jarry on fantasy, on a literature as far removed from utilitarian ends or immediate concerns as possible. He carries to an extreme the disaffection of 'decadents' and 'symbolists' with the contemporary world and their attempts to create a literature of escape from that world, a literature of anachronism, of legend, of myth. Literature must provide an escape from the "LOI et JUSTICE" of this world: these words are repeated mockingly four times in the early chapters of Faustroll(*). Jarry's extreme hostility to 'realist' literature, to a literature concerned with historical accuracy or detail or with an exact description of the contemporary world, and above all his utter contempt for 'naturalism', is in fact - as with the symbolists generally in their revolt against naturalism - a hostility to a literature of social involvement or concern. Literature - or art - must be an end in itself, and socially 'useless'. Jarry's aesthetic is a clear reflection of his nihilistic philosophy.

Secondly, Jarry does not just spurn the vulgar 'mob' and write for an élite, placing his work on a level comprehensible only to that élite. His conviction that there is nothing of any value to be 'said', along, no doubt, with a common revulsion against literary 'commercialism', cause him to refuse to conceive of literature as 'communication' at all. And this refusal (coupled, it is true, with his own

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(*) Cf. in particular, in chapter 6, Faustroll's words to the bailiff: "car j'emmène des êtres qui ont évadé votre LOI et JUSTICE entre les lignes de mes volumes saisis".

delight in verbal pyrotechnics) causes Jarry to tend in his work towards a divorce between word and meaning. Michel Décaudin characterizes the procedure of Jarry in much of his literary work in the following terms:

> Jarry ne renonçait pas aux recherches de langage et de sonorités rares de l'école symboliste; mais [...] il les vidait, en les utilisant, de leur fonction esthétique pour ne les justifier que par la fantaisie qui préside à leur création. En libérant ainsi l'expression poétique et l'image de toute signification - disons mieux, de toute signifiance - il leur reconnaissait une autonomie presque totale. Le poème tend à ne devenir qu'un jeu d'images qui tire sa fin de sa seule existence [...]. (120)

The roots of this development in symbolism are not hard to find, and Jarry seems to have been inspired in particular by his master Mallarmé. In the eyes of their contemporaries, the most notorious feature of the work of both 'decadents' and 'symbolists' was their experimentation with language and their deformation of conventional language (indeed, it was this which, in the 1880's, caused poets such as Mallarmé, Verlaine and Laforgue to be labelled 'decadents'). In part, this experimentation and deformation arise out of a consciousness that the writer or artist (or indeed any subject) <u>inevitably</u> deforms reality, including linguistic reality; hence the writer is of necessity, to a greater or lesser extent, a re-creator of language - the process of deformation (or re-creation) now merely becoming conscious and deliberate. Nevertheless, by and large in their theorizing, the symbolists did not depart from a 'referential' view of language - that is, the normal view of it as a vehicle of communication, in which each word is assigned by convention a given and fixed meaning, in which words point to something beyond themselves(121). Only Mallarmé, obsessed with the question of language, - and following him, Jarry -, departed from

this view. Mallarmé's starting-point is his desire to purge words of their conventional meaning, to "donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu". Moreover, in his reaction against Parnassian description, he tends to consider all forms of writing in which language is referential as mere "reportage"; and in his opposition to such "reportage" he tends to turn away from any form of literature which is in any way communication. At the same time, his revulsion against 'commercialism' in literature, against the idea of writing for a 'market', leads him to reject the idea of writing for a public at all. He tends to conceive of the writer as writing only for himself - not as a communicator, but as a creator. In this view, language becomes not a medium of communication but an object of creation. Moreover, by giving to words a new meaning, a meaning of the poet's own choosing, the poet is making the supreme assertion of his creative freedom.

Thus far Jarry (consciously or not) follows his master. His most explicit formulation of his aesthetic is to be found in the "Linteau" of Les Minutes de sable mémorial (a work which contains in embryo all his later works). Jarry incorporates into his own aesthetic the Mallarmean ideal: "Suggérer une chose, voilà le rêve", in the statement: "Suggérer au lieu de dire, faire dans la route des phrases un carrefour de tous les mots". Much more important, however, is the principle of total ambiguity which he goes on to develop; the relationship between word and meaning in the literary "chef-d'oeuvre" is defined in the terms (italicized by Jarry in the original): "le rapport de la phrase verbale

à tout sens qu'on y puisse trouver est constant"(122). Whether this means that the author has, consciously or unconsciously, made a synthesis of all possible meanings, or whether it means that there is a total divorce intended between word and meaning, the practical result is the same: all 'meanings' are equally valid, or, to put it another way, the 'meaning' of any proposition or phrase is everything, or... nothing. Once again, zero and infinity are equivalents; once again, the principle of the 'identity of opposites' prevails. Before all else comes the word, and the word is absolute, autonomous, an end in itself; as Jarry expressed it succinctly in one of his Spéculations: "Il n'y a que la lettre qui soit de la littérature". Such was the practice of Mallarmé in his celebrated 'Sonnet en -yx', finding or inventing the word "Ptyx" - inspired solely by the sound and appearance of the word; and it is doubtless no accident that in Faustroll the island which represents the work of Mallarmé is called "l'Ile de Ptyx". Yet a major difference separates Mallarmé and Jarry. In his theorizing, the former still holds to the idea of a literature which expresses something; this 'something' is in part merely an indefinable "état d'âme"; but Mallarmé tends also at times to conceive of 'poetry' as fulfilling the function of a now-defunct religion or metaphysics, endowing man's existence with its only possible 'meaning', with a transcendental significance(*). Such is not the case

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(*) Cf. his celebrated definition: "La Poésie est l'expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rhythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l'existence. Elle doue ainsi d'authenticité notre séjour et constitue la seule tâche spirituelle." (La Vogue, 18 April 1886. Cit. A. G. LEHMANN, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895, p. 90.)

with Jarry. For him, far from being a prophet, far from having any 'message', however obscure or enigmatic, to convey, any 'revelation' to make, the writer or poet is simply a juggler - or at best a sorcerer, a magician - with words. Again, the rôle of Jarry's philosophy in moulding his views of literature is clear.

But literature may be 'meaningless' and still be considered, with a greater or lesser degree of reverence, as 'Art'. Jarry did not escape entirely from the symbolist tendency to take an almost religious view of art. But one finds in his work a pull in two opposing direction. That he rejected certain conventional aesthetic values is undisputed; on 'good taste', for example, he declared categorically: "Le goût, nous l'emmerdons"(123). Nevertheless his work is split down the middle between a tendency to look upon literature as 'Art' in a manner similar to his symbolist contemporaries, and to strive after poetic 'beauty', however 'insolite'; and a tendency towards an 'anti-art', towards a denial of <u>all</u> aesthetic values, and towards a treatment of literature as mere 'spoofing' (the most rigorous expression of which is perhaps to be found in the declaration: "L'oeuvre d'art est un crocodile empaillé"!).

The most obvious example of the first tendency is to be found in some of the poems of <u>Les Minutes de sable mémorial</u>, where Jarry's intention is clearly the creation of a form of poetic beauty, albeit at times one which appeared strange or horrific to his contemporaries. And a similar ambition reappears momentarily in some of his later prose works - perhaps most obviously in the densely poetic

L'Amour absolu(*). The reverse side of the coin is perhaps best seen in César-Antéchrist, the work which followed Les Minutes. The work appears at first glance to be a poetic drama in the best symbolist, apocalyptic manner; and read superficially it might be taken as dealing, in a perfectly serious vein, with the theme of 'the death of God' and a vision of consequent rampant nihilism, the reign of an up-dated Anti-Christ. But in fact the whole work is the most amazingly elaborate piece of mystification. One layer of symbolism is heaped upon another to the point where all symbols become inextricable; in the words of J.-H. Sainmont, "Jarry exaspère les procédés allégoriques à un tel point qu'ils perdent signification [...]. Comment? Par une confusion totale [...] entre tous les "plans" [...] on ne sait jamais ce qui est symbole et symbolisé."(124) Rôles are interchanged, contradiction is heaped upon contradiction, and the final effect is of a total cancelling out of any possible meaning. The whole work is dominated by the image of the 'identity of opposites', reducing everything to a unity of meaninglessness. Rarely can mystification have been so elaborate(**).

(*) It reappears also in some of the later, unpublished poems of Jarry, collected and published by Maurice Saillet under the title La Revanche de la nuit. Saillet notes in his introduction to the volume that in these poems Jarry "essaie en vain de retrouver la veine des Minutes"; the poems "révèlent la survivance d'une certaine ambition poétique chez celui qui, prématurément vieilli, s'identifie maintenant au Docteur Faustroll".

(**) The extent to which deliberate mystification, farce and spoofing prevail in other works of Jarry has already been noted to some extent.

A special problem is created by the Ubu plays. Are these - as such features as their deliberately feeble humour and at times total absence of logic in construction(*) would seem to suggest - intended as the negation of all 'art'? Or are they, as some have seen them, a form of 'anti-art' which is still in a wider sense 'art' - precursors of certain 'anti-novels' of this century, and expressions of a new primitivism paralleling Rousseau and the cubist fascination with African masks? In fact, Jarry seems to have wavered between the two extremes represented by these views. His writings on the theatre leave no doubt as to his real belief in the possibilities of Ubu Roi, at least, on the stage - and in its potential as the herald of a new form of theatre. But equally, the figure of Ubu himself is certainly intended, at other times, as an expression of the negation of all 'art', in whatever form it may present itself. This aim of negation can be seen most clearly of all in Jarry's own identification with the figure of Ubu.

There are several reasons for Jarry's adoption of the rôle of Ubu - an adoption which Shattuck calls "one of the extreme cases in history of literary mimesis - of an author becoming one of his own characters"(125). In part,

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(*) Ubu Cocu will serve as a good example of this. Its structure is even more disjointed than that of Ubu Roi. There is almost no logic in the sequence of scenes and acts; characters simply pass across the stage without introduction and without any apparent link with the preceding action. The most striking example of this comes in the final scene, introduced by the stage-direction: "On entend sonner comme pour annoncer un train, puis le Crocodile, soufflant, traverse la scène." Thereupon, a crocodile does in fact shunt across the stage; yet there has been not the slightest mention of any crocodile up to this point!

Jarry found in Ubu a mask behind which he could hide his own highly sensitive self, and a compensation for his extreme timidity. The success of this manoeuvre - particularly at the time of his mother's death and during his military service - undoubtedly helped to accelerate the process of identification. But Jarry's adoption of the personage of Ubu was also, as has been frequently claimed, an element in his attempt to make of his own life 'a work of art'. The notion of making of life itself something 'artistic', if not explicitly a work of art, goes back to the ideal of the dandy - to Wilde, if not to Baudelaire. But, as André Breton rightly suggests, it finds its most rigorous exponent in Jarry. On several occasions, according to his biographers, after his more outlandish exploits, Jarry asked: "N'est-ce pas que c'était beau comme [de la] littérature?"(126). And Jarry has even been seen - so apparently total was his devotion to 'literature' in all its forms - as having 'given up' (and even 'sacrificed') his life to literature.

Yet this devotion, and this literature, are of a very special kind. A clue to its nature is to be found in Jarry's preoccupation with masks, the most frequent theme of all his writings on the theatre. The mask is not only something behind which to conceal oneself; it presents also the illusion (albeit crude and gross) of being another; it is an instrument of deception, blurring the line between reality and fiction. Here Jarry's preoccupation with masks links up with his cultivation, aided by alcohol, of hallucination: in an 'unreal' world, deliberate unreality must become the mode of existence; life - and with it literature - must become <u>acting</u>.

A further clue to Jarry's intentions can be found in his first-ever published text, in which 'pataphysics' also receives a first brief mention. The text embodies a dialogue between Père Ubu and the unfortunate "collecteur de polyhèdres", M. Achras, which contains the lines:

> PÈRE UBU. - Ceci vous plaît à dire, Monsieur, mais vous parlez à un grand pataphysicien.
> ACHRAS. - Pardon, Monsieur, vous dites?...
> PÈRE UBU. - Pataphysicien. La pataphysique est une science que nous avons inventée et dont le besoin se faisait généralement sentir. (127)

And when, a moment later, M. Achras protests at the way in which Ubu is behaving in virtue of his new 'science', declaring: "C'est une imposture manifeste", Ubu feigns to misunderstand: "Une posture magnifique! Parfaitement, Monsieur." Pataphysics, therefore, is an 'act', an "imposture manifeste" become "posture magnifique". Yet its principles underlie the whole of Jarry's life and work; in it lies the explanation both of his personal metamorphoses and of the ease with which, in his writings, he moves through all styles and genres, equally at home in all of them. In it lies the final clue to his devotion to 'literature'. If, time and time again with Jarry, the line between sincerity and mystification, between reality and fiction, seems impossible to drawm, here is the explanation; he was always 'sincere', and always spoofing. The whole of Jarry's life and work - the 'literature' of his writings as well as the 'literature' of his own life - is the expression of an immense and sustained 'act', a superb mystification, "une posture magnifique".

(vii) Conclusion.

There can have been few writers who have displayed such uncompromising hostility to the world in which they lived and its values as did Jarry. To this extent,he was indeed a rebel, a révolté - but a rebel in the name of no cause, save perhaps that of his own individual freedom(*). In this alone he is of major significance; his preoccupation with a personal, purely metaphysical freedom recalls at times that of Bergson, whilst in some ways the conduct and course of his life seem to point forward strangely to Gide and his "acte gratuit".

But he is significant in other ways too. Jarry differs in at least one major respect from the other writer-intellectuals we have studied to date: where they attempt to flee from or to overcome the nihilism of their youth, Jarry accepts and systematizes this nihilism. His system of pataphysics, whose principles underlie his life and work, represents a deliberate onslaught upon the values and the conceptions of 'reality' held by his contemporaries - unaccompanied by any serious attempt at 'reconstruction'. It is scarcely surprising that in this attack he is not always successful or consistent; life is made up of relativities and compromises, whereas Jarry's tendency is to express his ideas in uncompromising, absolute terms. As a consequence, he is caught time and again in a web of self-contradiction. Nonetheless, as we have seen, far from attempting

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(*) One can describe him, more specifically, as in revolt against bourgeois society and its values. But Jarry's 'bourgeois', like that of Flaubert, and indeed of a whole literary tradition dating from the time of romanticism, is essentially a cultural phenomenon; he is only secondarily a social phenomenon, and not at all an economic one. Hence, for all his scathing attacks upon "les bourgeois", Jarry's revolt against bourgeois society is, emphatically, not made in the name of some other form of society, past, present or future.

to separate the two possibly irreconcilable planes of theory and practice, of philosophy and life, Jarry resolutely endeavours to live up to his ideas, in his cultivation of 'absurdity' and 'unreality' in his own life. Indeed, such is his determination in this enterprise that it is difficult not to see in it at least a touch of madness - in a literal sense. But the important point is that Jarry finds the source of these developments, the ideas which he carries to extremes, in the fund of ideas common to a large number of his contemporaries in the ranks of the Parisian literary intelligentsia.

All the same, there is a problem here. Where the intellectual sources of a Lahor, a Laforgue or a Barrès are relatively easy to trace, those of Jarry, partly through a lack of autobiographical material but for other reasons also, are largely shrouded in mystery - so much so that a casual acquaintance with his work might lead one not to consider him as an 'intellectual' at all (or for that matter as sufficiently 'philosophically minded' to warrant discussion here). Part of the aim of this chapter has been to dispel that mystery - to reveal Jarry's intellectual roots in the solipsistic tendencies inherent in much of the thought of the symbolists, in the anti-social, anarchistic individualism of the 1890's, and in that critique of the nature and pretensions of 'science' which was steadily gaining ground throughout the 1890's in France. The fact that Jarry carries these tendencies to extremes, far from making him irrelevant, makes him all the more important in the context of this study. The extreme form of nihilism which he evolves - the most radical by far of any we have

yet seen - serves to underline the possible negative - or nihilistic - developments inherent in those intellectual tendencies of his age. And if his roots are here, his posterity - in literature at least - is to be found in the nihilism of Dada.

Chapter X: REFERENCES.

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(4) Albert CAMUS, L'Homme révolté, Paris, Gallimard, 1951.

(5) Roger SHATTUCK, The Banquet Years. The Arts in France, 1885-1914, London, Faber, 1958, pp. 175-176. (Although the interpretation of Jarry put forward in this chapter disagrees fundamentally with the optimism and humanism of Shattuck's final conclusions, this work remains by far the best study of Jarry yet to have appeared.)

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(9) Cf. the excellent and authoritative article of J.-H. SAINMONT (pseud.), 'Ubu ou la création d'un mythe', Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique [hereinafter called Cahiers], No. 3-4, pp. 57-69.

(10) ibid., p. 64.

(11) Cf. ibid., p. 62.

(12) For an exhaustive list of the many fragments of the Ubu cycle published by Jarry both before and after the famous first performance of Ubu Roi on 10 Dec. 1896, as well as the many performances the work received as a puppet-play, cf. the 'Chronologie du Père Ubu' given by Maurice Saillet as an introduction to his excellent edition of Tout Ubu, Livre de Poche, 1962.

(13) For an extremely detailed account of this campaign, cf. P. LIÉ (pseud.), 'Comment Jarry et Lugné-Poe glorifièrent Ubu à l'Oeuvre', Cahiers 3-4, pp. 37-51.

(14) 'Discours prononcé à la première représentation d'Ubu Roi', in O.C., IV, p. 23; Tout Ubu, p. 19.

(15) 'Les Paralipomènes d'Ubu', in O.C., IV, p. 145 (with some errors); Tout Ubu, p. 165.

(16) In the article 'Questions de théâtre', the vocabulary of Jarry reveals a conception of Ubu rather as a wild beast whom one 'lets loose on the stage': "Je pense qu'il n'y a aucune espèce de raison d'écrire une oeuvre sous forme dramatique, à moins que l'on ait eu la vision d'un personnage qu'il soit plus commode de lâcher sur une scène que d'analyser dans un livre." (O.C., IV, p. 157; Tout Ubu, p. 152.)

(17) Les Minutes de sable mémorial (1894), in O.C., IV, p. 193. Also, with minor modifications, in Ubu Cocu, First Version, Act II, Scene 4.

(18) The Banquet Years, p. 176.

(19) César-Antéchrist, 'Acte terrestre', in O.C., IV, p. 297.

(20) Ubu Roi, Act III, Scene 4.

(21) Les Minutes de sable mémorial, in O.C., IV, p. 263.

(22) 'Autre présentation d'Ubu Roi', in Tout Ubu, p. 22. Not in O.C.

(23) 'Questions de théâtre', in O.C., IV, p. 158; Tout Ubu, p. 153.

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(25) Laurent TAILHADE, Quelques fantômes de jadis, Paris, 1920, pp. 213-214.

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(27) Cit. Cahier No. 10, p. 62. Bauer was dramatic critic of L'Echo de Paris at the time of the performance of Ubu Roi.

(28) Cit. Cahier No. 3-4, p. 62.

(29) Cf, Cahier No. 10, 'Catalogue de l'Expojarrysition', p.83.

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(32) 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre', in O.C., IV, p. 163; Tout Ubu, p. 141.

(33) 'Douze arguments sur le théâtre'. Published in Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique, No. 5; Tout Ubu, p. 146.

(34) 'Questions de théâtre', in O.C., IV, p. 157; Tout Ubu, p. 152.

(35) Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien, chapter 7.

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(37) Published in L'Art littéraire, No. 5, 1894. Reprinted in Cahier No. 1, p. 5.

(38) Incorporated into Ubu Cocu (both versions).

(39) Published in the Mercure de France, May 1896, p. 295.

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(49) O.C., I, p. 43; M.F. ed., p. 78.

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(59) Cf. the article by J.-H. SAINMONT, Cahier No. 26-27, p. 45.

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(65) O.C., V, pp. 191-2; M.F. ed., p. 55.

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(74) The 'Oeuvres complètes' of 1948 omit the word "Pataphysicien" from the title. It occurs, however, in both the existing MSS. (Cf. Cahier No. 10, 'Catalogue de l'Expojarrysition', pp. 9-10.)

(75) An elucidation of some of the difficulties can be found in Cahier No. 10, 'Catalogue de l'Expojarrysition', and in Cahier No. 22-23, devoted exclusively to a study of Faustroll.

(76) For an erudite discussion of Jarry's borrowings from Rabelais, cf. the article of François CARADEC, 'Eléments d'une contribution d'apparence lexico- /

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(97) Cf. K. D. UITTI, The Concept of Self in the Symbolist Novel, The Hague, 1961; and chapter IX, supra, on Barrès.

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(123) According to Ferdinand LOT, Alfred Jarry. Son Oeuvre, Paris, Eds. de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1934.

(124) J.-H. SAINMONT, 'Petit guide illustré pour la visite de César-Antéchrist', Cahier No. 5-6, p. 56. This very important article contains an extremely detailed analysis of César-Antéchrist.

(125) SHATTUCK, The Banquet Years, p. 172.

(126) The words are reported, with minor variations, by APOLLINAIRE, article cited, and F. LOT, op. cit., p.74.

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Chapter XI: FOUR STUDIES IN NIHILISM.

Up to now we have been concerned with a study of the nihilism which manifests itself in the thought of various writers - that is, with a study of men and of their ideas as these are revealed in their work as a whole, or in a substantial part of it. There are however numerous individual works of literature by other writers in the period 1880-1900 which describe either characters who show nihilistic traits, or what one might call 'nihilistic situations', and a study of these can also be valuable. In this chapter, therefore, four of these works have been selected for examination, both for their intrinsic philosophical significance and for the contribution which they can make to the general picture of nihilism in the years with which we are concerned.

1. J.-K. HUYSMANS, A rebours (1884).

Huysmans believed that in A rebours he was writing for no more than a dozen or so readers; he was therefore little short of amazed at the success which the work enjoyed. It seems little wonder now, however, that it should have become a veritable Bible - or 'Breviary' - for the young aesthetes or self-styled 'decadents' of the 1880's; indeed, it helped to give a name to the movement and provided both much of its style and many of its key concepts. Its hero, Duke Jean Floressas des Esseintes, is in fact a decadent and dandy to beat all decadents and dandies - to the point of being a highly delightful caricature of the type. Whilst at the same time, in his neurosis, he is an

equally typical representative - in the eyes of many contemporaries - of modern urban man. Yet although the work owes much of its success to passing fashion, it has also a more profound importance; more than any other work of its time, it sums up and expresses a mood of lassitude and of disgust, of pessimism verging on nihilism, and a desire for escape from the contemporary world. It was to this fact also that A rebours owed much of its success.

Two features of the novel in particular struck Huysmans' contemporaries (apart from his onslaughts on accepted tastes and fashions in literature and the arts): the hero's utter contempt for and hatred of the society in whose midst he found himself, and his Schopenhauerian 'pessimism'; and his attempt to create for himself an existence of absolute solitude (the novel was originally to have been entitled Seul), an existence devoted to a cult of all that is 'artificial' - an attempt to live life, in all respects, "à rebours".

The latter feature can perhaps best be examined first. Des Esseintes' cult of artifice undoubtedly owes much to the paradoxes of Baudelaire, from one of whose prose-poems is also borrowed the phrase in which des Esseintes sums up his desire for escape and refuge from the present: "N'importe où, hors du monde!"(1). Disgusted with the world, he turns his back on 'natural' existence within society to live a life of complete solitude in his "thébaïde raffinée"; here, we are told, "il vivait sur lui-même, se nourrissant de sa propre substance"(2). There is even a monkish quality about this existence, and des Esseintes in fact manages to create the illusion of living "dans le fin fond d'un cloître":

> Et, somme toute, l'illusion était facile, puisqu'il menait une existence presque analogue à celle d'un religieux. [...] tel qu'un moine aussi, il était accablé d'une lassitude immense, d'un besoin de recueillement, d'un désir de ne plus avoir rien de commun avec les profanes qui étaient, pour lui, les utilitaires et les imbéciles. (3)

In this retreat, he lives not by day but by night, "pensant qu'on était mieux chez soi, plus seul, et que l'esprit ne s'excitait et ne crépitait réellement qu'au contact voisin de l'ombre"(4). To health and robustness he prefers all that is sickly, neurotic and feverish, above all everything which irritates and stimulates the nerves. His artistic preferences go to everything that is 'decadence' - hence his predilection for the authors of the Latin 'Decadence' and for the 'decadent' literature of his own age (once again, an identification is made between the former period and the French nineteenth century). Whilst a climax to this cult of the artificial comes at the height of his neurotic illness - which he both suffers from and encourages - when, his stomach totally rejecting all forms of food, he receives nourishment by means of an enema! -

> L'opération réussit et des Esseintes ne put s'empêcher de s'adresser de tacites félicitations à propos de cet événement qui couronnait, en quelque sorte, l'existence qu'il s'était créée; son penchant vers l'artificiel avait maintenant, et sans même qu'il l'eût voulu, atteint l'exaucement suprême; on n'irait pas plus loin; la nourriture ainsi absorbée était, à coup sûr, la dernière déviation qu'on pût commettre. (5)

Moreover, des Esseintes' attempt to seek refuge from the world involves also a retreat into the unreality of dream. Hallucination is a product of his neurotic disorders; but at the same time, he attempts, like Jarry (on a much more grandiose scale), through a deliberate cultivation of hallucination, to replace <u>reality</u> by <u>dream</u>:

> Le tout est de savoir s'y prendre, de savoir concentrer son esprit sur un seul point, de savoir s'abstraire suffisamment pour amener l'hallucination et pouvoir substituer le rêve de la réalité à la réalité même.(6)(*)

At one time des Esseintes had tried to make use of opium and hashish as stimulants, but his delicate stomach had refused them and he had been forced to renounce these "grossiers excitants" and to "demander à sa cervelle seule, de l'emporter loin de la vie, dans les rêves"(7). He attempts to stimulate violently his nervous system "par d'érudites hystéries, par des cauchemars compliqués, par des visions nonchalantes et atroces"(8). Whilst on a less exalted level - as the episode of his planned trip to London shows - to the reality of experience he prefers the illusions conjured up by the imagination: why travel to London, when one can create the illusion of being there from an English tavern in Paris? "A quoi bon bouger, quand on peut voyager si magnifiquement sur une chaise?"(9)

Behind this cult of the artificial and of unreality lies a philosophical view of the 'bankruptcy' of the concept of 'Nature'. In a passage undoubtedly inspired by Baudelaire, Huysmans expresses the idea that nature is 'finished' and must be replaced by creations of man alone - by artifice:

(*) Like Jarry also, he professes contempt for the artistic tastes of "le commun des hommes" with their "grossières rétines" (A rebours, Charpentier ed., p. 19). Cf. Jarry in 'Questions de théâtre': "N'avons-nous pas le droit de considérer [...] la foule - qui nous dit aliénés par surabondance, par ceci que des sens exacerbés nous donnent des sensations à son avis hallucinatoires - comme un aliéné par défaut (un idiot, disent les hommes de science), dont les sens sont restés si rudimentaires qu'elle ne perçoit que des impressions immédiates?" (Tout Ubu, p. 154.)

> Au reste, l'artifice paraissait à des Esseintes la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme. Comme il le disait, la nature a fait son temps; elle a définitivement lassé, par la dégoûtante uniformité de ses paysages et de ses ciels, l'attentive patience des raffinés. [...]
>
> Il n'est, d'ailleurs, aucune de ses inventions réputée si subtile ou si grandiose que le génie humain ne puisse créer...
>
> A n'en pas douter, cette sempiternelle radoteuse a maintenant usé la débonnaire admiration des vrais artistes, et le moment est venu où il s'agit de la remplacer, autant que faire se pourra, par l'artifice. (10)

Such a view is expressed here, of course, in an explicitly artistic context (and is also clearly intended to shock); but it holds good in a wider context, too, as des Esseintes' passing reflections elsewhere in the novel on the cruelty of nature and its law of brutal struggle for survival reveal. Whilst the fact is perhaps most evident of all in his reflections upon his nourishment by enema: "enfin quelle décisive insulte jetée à la face de cette vieille nature dont les uniformes exigences seraient pour jamais éteintes!"(11). The whole of his cult of artificiality represents a deliberate attempt to flout 'nature', whose standards are no longer held to be valid, and forms part of the wider phenomenon of the growing 'bankruptcy' of the concept of nature in these years, of the growing belief that values based or ostensibly based on an appeal to nature are no longer valid.

So much for des Esseintes' cult of artifice; what of his attitude to the world around him, and how far can he be called a nihilist? The reader cannot fail to be struck by the force and vigour of his condemnation of contemporary society and all its values. His contemporaries are "sacripants" and "imbéciles"; he lives in an "haïssable époque

d'indignes muflements", dominated by a "sottise invétérée"; and he even suffers physically from the sight of his fellow human beings(12). This contempt is not restricted to any one element of society, but extends to all social classes - from an aristocracy which has disintegrated and sunk "dans l'imbécillité ou dans l'ordure", through a clergy which has been corrupted by lust for wealth, through the bourgeoisie, "l'aristocratie de l'argent", to the 'populace', the "éternelle et nécessaire dupe" of the latter(13). Not surprisingly, however, des Esseintes' most violent hatred is directed at the ruling bourgeoisie and its values based solely (as he sees it) on a worship of material wealth. This class is "plus scélérate, plus vile que la noblesse dépouillée et que le clergé déchu". Concerning its rise to power, he writes:

> Maintenant, c'était un fait acquis. Une fois sa besogne terminée, la plèbe avait été, par mesure d'hygiène, saignée à blanc; le bourgeois rassuré, trônait, jovial, de par la force de son argent et la contagion de sa sottise. Le résultat de son avènement avait été l'écrasement de toute intelligence, la négation de toute probité, la mort de tout art [...] c'était enfin, l'immense, la profonde, l'incommensurable goujaterie du financier et du parvenu, rayonnant, tel qu'un abject soleil, sur la ville idolâtre qui éjaculait, à plat ventre, d'impurs cantiques devant le tabernacle impie des banques! (14)

This disgust and loathing lie at the root of des Esseintes' spleen and ennui, from which, like all good decadents, he suffers intolerably: Huysmans describes him as "revenu de tout, abattu par l'hypocondrie, écrasé par le spleen"(15). But the point reached in des Esseintes' spiritual evolution even at the beginning of the novel lies a stage beyond that of the heroes of the 'decadent' novels of the 1880's and 1890's - the works of Lorrain,

Péladan and others; he has grown tired even of the endless debauches and perversions to which they turn for distraction from their spleen:

> Une seule passion, la femme, eût pu le retenir dans cet universel dédain qui le poignait, mais celle-là était, elle aussi, usée. (16)

For a philosophical expression of his spleen and a confirmation of his view of the world, des Esseintes turns to Schopenhauer (who is in fact the only philosopher mentioned in the novel) - though seeing in Schopenhauer above all the exponent of a pessimism with regard to life on this earth similar to that professed by the mediaeval Church. In this philosophy he finds a source of consolation:

> Ici, des Esseintes reprenait pied. Certes, il était satisfait de cet aveu de l'ordure sociale, mais alors, il se révoltait contre le vague remède d'une espérance en une autre vie. Schopenhauer était plus exact; sa doctrine et celle de l'Eglise partaient d'un point de vue commun; lui aussi se basait sur l'iniquité et sur la turpitude du monde, lui aussi jetait avec l'Imitation de Notre-Seigneur, cette clameur douloureuse: "C'est vraiment une misère que de vivre sur la terre!" Lui aussi prêchait le néant de l'existence, les avantages de la solitude [...] mais il ne vous prônait aucune panacée, ne vous berçait, pour remédier à d'inévitables maux, par aucun leurre. [...] Ah! lui seul était dans le vrai! [...] Il ne prétendait rien guérir, n'offrait aux malades aucune compensation, aucun espoir; mais sa théorie du Pessimisme était, en somme, la grande consolatrice des intelligences choisies, des âmes élevées [...]. (17)

For the most part, this philosophy remains an orthodox pessimism, involving no explicit denial of human values and ending, like the outlook of mediaeval Christianity, in resignation: "Élancée de la même piste que l'Imitation, cette théorie aboutissait, elle aussi [...] au même endroit, à la resignation, au laisser-faire."(18) Yet such a denial - both of human values, and of the value of existence as a whole - is implicit in des Esseintes' philosophy, and it

becomes explicit as his meditation proceeds. In his loathing for society - "cette hideuse société qui nous rançonne"(19) - he sets out to corrupt a youth with the express intention of turning him into a thief and a murderer, an 'enemy' of that society. Like Schopenhauer, he advocates the extinction of the human race through the cessation of reproduction, and castigates the pity and charity of a Saint Vincent de Paul for saving lives instead of extinguishing them - in a total condemnation both of Christian values and of the values of humanism:

> Et depuis que ce vieillard [Vincent de Paul] était décédé, ses idées avaient prévalu; on recueillait des enfants abandonnés au lieu de les laisser doucement périr sans qu'ils s'en aperçussent, et cependant cette vie qu'on leur conservait, devenait, de jours en jours, plus rigoureuse et plus aride! [...] Ah! si jamais, au nom de la pitié, l'inutile procréation devait être abolie, c'était maintenant! (20)

Whilst at the end of the novel, des Esseintes concludes his survey of the classes of society with a nihilistic wish for the total destruction of this world - a destruction not qualified by the desire for the emergence of a better, purer society on the other side of the holocaust:

> Eh! croule donc, société! meurs donc, vieux monde! s'écria des Esseintes, indigné par l'ignominie du spectacle qu'il évoquait [...]. (21)

The end of the novel witnesses the final collapse even of the artificial, solitary existence which des Esseintes has tried to create for himself. The attempt to create a world of pure artifice was at least, in the absence of all else, an affirmation of belief in the power of the human intellect and of the human imagination (des Esseintes' meditations upon his cult of artifice end with the reflection: "à coup sûr, on peut le dire: l'homme a fait, dans son

genre, aussi bien que le Dieu auquel il croit"). Now even this fails, and,as Barbey d'Aurevilly melodramatically but accurately put it in his celebrated review of the novel, "le révolté a senti son néant"(22). Even "les raisonnements du pessimisme", "les consolantes maximes de Schopenhauer", are now "impuissants à le soulager": "Il ne pouvait pas se le dissimuler, il n'y avait rien, plus rien, tout était par terre"(23). From this nihilistic impasse, only one thing seems to offer any hope of salvation or comfort - the lost and repudiated faith of his childhood. A rebours closes with des Esseintes formulating the prayer:

> Seigneur, prenez pitié du chrétien qui doute, de l'incrédule qui voudrait croire, du forçat de la vie qui s'embarque seul, dans la nuit, sous un firmament que n'éclairent plus les consolants fanaux du vieil espoir!

Yet it is important to grasp the nature of this faith to which des Esseintes turns: he seeks not a new source of meaning in this life nor a new basis for the values of existence which he has repudiated , but simply, and explicitly, "l'impossible croyance en une vie future" which would be "seule apaisante" - that is to say, he seeks not a means of overcoming the nihilism into which he has fallen, but simply the assurance of a new form of escape from a condemned and intolerable world.

In A rebours, in the 'decadent' movement whose Bréviaire it became, and indeed in the whole of Huysmans' work, can be seen a proclamation of disgust with and rejection of both the social and political idealism of the earlier nineteenth century, and beyond this of the humanistic faith of three centuries - the consequence of which is an implicit but

radical nihilism. And no less clearly can be seen one of the elements (alongside the aesthetic inspiration and spiritual solace to be found in the Catholic faith) of the personal 'salvation' which Huysmans - and numerous others after him - were to seek in the arms of the Church.

2. VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM, Axël (1890).

If A rebours expresses a mood of disgust with the contemporary world, a similar impassioned protest against that world and its values runs through the whole of the work of Philippe-Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Villiers seems almost to incarnate the romantic concept of the poet born out of his time: like des Esseintes (but unlike Huysmans), he is an aristocrat in a world increasingly dominated by the bourgeoisie. His awareness of and intense pride in his lofty origins undoubtedly colour his passionate rejection of that society and its values; his particular sense of alienation from the values of his contemporaries thus differs partly in origin from that of other writers studied to date, and prevents us from regarding Villiers as wholly representative. Nevertheless the philosophical conceptions of Villiers represent in several respects an extreme development of ideas common amongst his literary contemporaries - and were in turn to have an enormous influence upon younger writers of the symbolist movement(24).

In particular, a study of Villiers throws an interesting light upon the exact nature of the 'idealism' of many symbolists. Amongst the latter, Villiers was venerated as,

in the words of Gourmont, "l'exorciste du réel et le portier de l'idéal. [...] il a rouvert les portes de l'au-delà closes [...] et par ces portes toute une génération s'est ruée vers l'infini"(25). Yet Villiers' loudly proclaimed idealism, with its source supposedly in Hegel, is in fact much closer to a position of solipsism than to any belief in an objective 'ideal' reality. This is a development which appears in his work at a relatively early stage, to culminate in his last published work, Axël(*).

Beginning as a self-proclaimed disciple of Hegel (although his Hegelianism appears to have been largely second-hand, deriving from the master's leading French exponent, Véra(26)), Villiers came to derive from Hegel a personal philosophy to which he himself gave the name of 'illusionism' (he planned to write a treatise entitled

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(*) Although not published in volume form until 1890, a year after his death, the composition of Axël spans over twenty years of Villiers' life. According to M. DAIREAUX, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris, 1936), Villiers first conceived the idea of the work as early as 1862, and from 1885 onwards the drama was ready for publication as a volume, parts of it appearing in literary reviews of the time. However, the definitiveness of the work has been contested. Concerning this, the following seems certain. There can be no doubt that for some years prior to the months immediately preceding his death, Villiers was perfectly satisfied with the work as it now stands; as late as March 1889 he wrote to his publisher: "J'ai tout pesé jusqu'à la dernière virgule, je n'ai pas un zeste à changer." It was only at the last moment that certain of his friends inspired scruples in Villiers concerning the work's 'unchristian' dénouement - the suicide of the two lovers. According to Huysmans, in a note to the first edition (reprinted in Oeuvres complètes, IV, p. 273), Villiers "jugeait qu'au point de vue catholique, son livre n'était pas suffisamment orthodoxe, et il voulait que la croix intervînt dans la scène qui dénoue le drame". The same opinion was expressed by Remy de Gourmont, who received the papers of Villiers from Huysmans, in an article in the Revue Indépendante of 1st July 1890: Axël was to turn to the cross for salvation. Moreover, a fragment discovered amongst Villiers' papers points to the same conclusion. Such an ending, however, would be merely a deus ex machina; it has no organic connection with the rest of the work, and would have made nonsense of its philosophy.

L'Illusionisme expounding its principles, as one of a series of three "Oeuvres de métaphysique"(26A)). The starting-point of this philosophy, frequently reiterated, is the idea that our senses deceive us, that 'objective' knowledge is impossible, and that man is trapped inside his own 'self':

> nos sens nous trompent et nous ne pouvons pas voir les choses telles qu'elles sont [...]. (27)
>
> Je ne sors pas de moi-même. C'est l'histoire de Narcisse. (28)
>
> l'Homme s'agite en vain dans la geôle mouvante de son MOI, sans pouvoir s'évader de l'Illusion où le captivent ses sens dérisoires. (29)

From this point, however, Villiers goes on to advocate the reconstruction of a body of knowledge or beliefs upon a purely subjective basis - a process in which the will plays a major rôle. The ultimate conclusion of this process is to be found in the often-repeated exhortation, reminiscent in some ways of both Lahor and Jarry, to endeavour to 'become God':

> je ne puis, en réalité, rien connaître d'extérieur à ma Pensée. Donc l'Univers ne sera pour moi que ce que je le croirai. Ce n'est pour moi que l'idée que je puis m'en faire. (30)
>
> Il n'est, pour l'Homme, d'autre vérité que celle qu'il accepte de croire entre toutes les autres, - aussi douteuses que celle qu'il choisit: choisis donc celle qui te rend un dieu. (31)
>
> La vie est un choix à faire: il ne s'agit que de vouloir grandir en soi-même pour se sentir vivre. Tout est dans la volonté, pour nous! (32)

The fullest expression of this philosophy of 'illusionism' is to be found in Axël. Here, too, Villiers attempts to realise his life-long wish to bring about a fusion of the three philosophies of Christianity, Hegelianism and

occultism, partly achieved in the doctrines professed by the Archdeacon and Maître Janus. The similarities between the philosophies of these two men are great (though not so great, as some critics have suggested, as to make them identical). Both contain elements of occultism deriving from mystical traditions thousands of years old, and both call for a total renunciation by the individual of his 'self' or of his humanity, in order to attain, in the one case, communion with God, in the other, immortality, absolute freedom, and "le suprême Savoir". This basic similarity is symbolised in the identical question put to Axël by Janus and to Sara by the Archdeacon at the end of their respective expositions of their doctrines: "Acceptes-tu la Lumière, l'Espérance et la Vie?" - to which both Axël and Sara reply, quite independently, with a categorical "Non"(33).

But the analogy extends even further than this. Both philosophies have a common foundation in Villiers' illusionism; both ultimately rest upon the view that there is (for us at least) no 'reality', no 'truth', no 'meaning', other than that which we create for ourselves. A hint of such a view is contained in the Archdeacon's long sermon when he tells Sara:

> La Foi n'est-elle pas l'unique preuve de toute chose? Aucune autre, fournie par les sens ou la raison, ne satisferait, tu le sais d'avance, ton esprit. Dès lors, à quoi bon même chercher? [...] Croire, n'est-ce pas se projeter en l'objet de sa croyance et s'y réaliser soi-même? [...] Alors que tu n'étais pas, hier enfin, Dieu crut bien en toi, puisque te voici, toute appelée hors du Nul par la Foi créatrice! Rends-Lui donc l'écho de son appel! A toi de croire en Lui! A ton tour de LE CRÉER en toi, de tout l'<u>être</u> de ta vie! (34)

And a moment later the ultimate foundation of this faith is made clear:

> Le monde nous traite en insensés qui s'illusionnent jusqu'à sacrifier leurs jours pour un puéril rêve, pour l'ombre d'un ciel imaginé. - Mais [...] de quel droit le monde le prendrait-il de si haut quand bien même il nous plairait de préférer, sciemment, le songe sublime de Dieu aux mortels mensonges de la terre? [...] Illusion pour illusion, nous gardons <u>celle</u> de Dieu, qui donne, seule, à ses éternels éblouis, la joie, la lumière, la force et la paix.(35)

The fullest exposition of Villiers' illusionism, however, is to be found in the reply to Axël of Maître Janus:

> Sache une fois pour toujours qu'il n'est d'autre univers pour toi que la conception même qui s'en réfléchit au fond de tes pensées; - car tu ne peux le voir pleinement, ni le connaître, en distinguer même un seul point tel que ce mystérieux point doit être en sa réalité. [...] la Vérité n'est, elle-même, qu'une indécise conception de l'espèce où tu passes et qui prête à la Totalité les formes de son esprit. Si tu veux la posséder, crée-là! comme tout le reste! Tu n'emporteras, tu ne seras que ta création. Le monde n'aura jamais, pour toi, d'autre sens que celui que tu lui attribueras. (36)

In the hotch-potch of ideas put by Villiers into the mouth of Janus, there is at times the suggestion, found in certain occultist doctrines and, in a slightly different form, in Hegel, that there is a fundamental identity between the 'essence' of the individual 'self' and the 'essence' (as distinct from the form) of the universe; but the dominant concept is that of the 'creation' of reality by the self. In both the doctrine of Janus and in that of the Archdeacon, moreover, one finds emphasized the rôle of the <u>will</u> in this creation; the former tells Axël: "tu possèdes l'être réel de toutes choses en ta pure volonté"(37)(*); and although

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(*) Cf. also the phrase which the Commandant reads in the mysterious <u>Traité des Causes secondes</u> which he opens: "Tout verbe, dans le cercle de son action, crée ce qu'il exprime. Mesure donc ce que tu accordes de volonté aux fictions de ton esprit." (<u>Oeuvres complètes</u>, IV, p. 88.)

the Archdeacon speaks not of will but of 'faith', he makes it clear that this faith arises from the deliberate choice of one illusion in preference to another. Finally, both philosophies emphasize that in this 'creation' by will or faith man should aim for the highest - to become himself eternal, to 'become God'. Thus Janus exhorts his disciple: "tu es le dieu que tu peux devenir"; "Tu n'es que ce que tu penses: pense-toi donc éternel"; "Puisque tu ne sortiras pas de l'illusion que tu te feras de l'univers, choisis la plus divine. [...] Tu es ton futur créateur. Tu es un Dieu qui ne feint d'oublier sa toute-essence qu'afin d'en réaliser le rayonnement."(38). And thus also the Archdeacon: "puisque nous ne pouvons devenir que notre pensée unie à la chair occulte de nos actes, pensons et agissons de manière à ce qu'un Dieu puisse devenir en nous!"(39).

Such are the philosophies of "Le Monde religieux" and "Le Monde occulte" - philosophies rejected by Sara and Axël respectively. Sara's reasons for her refusal are not stated; presumably she is motivated by the simple desire to live, symbolized in the quest for gold. But Axël's reasons are clear. In part, his refusal also derives, initially, from this desire - hence his retorts to Janus: "Eh bien, c'est acheter trop cher le néant: je suis homme; je ne veux pas devenir une statue de pierre", and: "Ah! que m'importe! c'est trop sombre! je veux vivre! Je veux ne plus savoir!"(40). But his refusal has also a more philosophical basis; he begins to realise the negative implications of the illusionist doctrine which Janus has just expounded before him. If all 'truths', all values,

all conceptions of reality are equally illusory, then all are equally valid - or invalid; and both the doctrine of Janus and the goal which he places before Axël must also be illusions. The difference between Axël and his master is essentially one of emphasis; yet this emphasis is all-important, involving the difference between acceptance and rejection. Axël's position, as he meditates upon his reply to Janus, is clear:

> Au nom de quelle vérité l'Homme pourrait-il condamner une doctrine, si ce n'est au nom d'une autre doctrine, de principes aussi discutables que ceux de la première? Et, autre âge, autres principes. La Science constate, mais n'explique pas: c'est la fille aînée des chimères: toutes les chimères sont donc, au même titre que le monde - la plus ancienne! - quelque chose de plus que le Néant... (41)

His words seem to reflect a final turn in the thought of Villiers, the realisation of the failure of his attempt to base religious and metaphysical belief on the principles of his illusionism, which ends by undermining all systems of belief(*). Axël's new-found total scepticism brings him back to the very starting-point of the philosophy of

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(*) It is this element of the work which makes Villiers' last-minute attempts to 'christianise' it inevitably doomed to failure. For example, in a fragment published by Huysmans as an appendix to the original edition of Axël and obviously designed to prepare a 'Christian' dénouement, Villiers resorts once again to the argument, outlined above, used by the Archdeacon - when this same argument has already undermined the faith which he is trying to bolster up by the use of it. To Maître Janus who asks, speaking of his doctrine: "quel but proposer à ta vie plus digne d'elle que d'atteindre de telles finalités?", Axël replies: "Mon esprit se détourne aujourd'hui de ce genre de mirages. Un ciel d'orgueil à jamais vide et à l'abandon, situé entre la prunelle et la paupière, ne suffit pas à l'envergure d'une âme assoiffée de l'immense, à mon humanité. Moi aussi, j'ai rêvé de Dieu! vraiment, c'était plus beau. Foi pour foi, s'il faut choisir, il me paraît plus sage de garder une croyance natale. [...] Cette foi court dans mes veines. Je choisis de rester chrétien." (O.C., IV, Appendix, p. 276)

Janus, to a solipsism which has now become a conscious nihilism.

This nihilism, moreover, takes on a specifically ethical form through Axël's claim to a complete moral autonomy - symbolized in the legend, in whose light he sees himself, of "le Vieux de la Montagne" (a symbol which occurs in the work of Jarry also). In the person of Axël is to be found all of Villiers' aristocratic individualism, his refusal to submit to the values of his contemporaries, be it in art, in politics, or in ethics. First we learn of Axël's rejection of ethical concepts of 'right' and 'duty', and of the notion of patriotism, then, in his exchange with the Commandant, his claim to a nihilistic total moral autonomy is made explicit:

> Ici, je n'ai plus de comptes à rendre; sur ce point je ne puis admettre de juge. Assentiments, blâmes, stupeurs, me trouveraient également insensibles; - en ma "conscience", j'ai, seul, qualité pour délibérer; je décide: - et tout est dit. (42)
>
> Nul, jamais, n'eut d'autres droits que ceux qu'il prit - et sut garder. (43)

Finally, the suicide of the two lovers in the final scene of the work is a direct consequence of the philosophical doctrines which Axël now embraces. All truths appear equally worthless, all goals equally pointless; whilst now also all ideas of happiness seem illusory, all hopes irrealisable. Axël has learned the lesson of Janus only too well; to the former's complaint that the isolation of his existence forces him to live solely in a world of dreams, Janus replies: "Et de quoi voudrais-tu vivre? - De quoi vivent les vivants, sinon de mirages, - d'espoirs vils, toujours

déçus?"(44).(*) Hence Axël's conclusion: why attempt to turn back to life? it is pointless. His reply to Sara's entreaties is categorical:

> Vivre? Non. - Notre existence est remplie, - et sa coupe déborde! - Quel sablier comptera les heures de cette nuit! L'Avenir?... Sara, crois en cette parole: nous venons de l'épuiser. Toutes les réalités, demain, que seraient-elles, en comparaison des mirages que nous venons de vivre? [...]
> La qualité de notre espoir ne nous permet plus la terre. Que demander, sinon de pâles reflets de tels instants, à cette misérable étoile, où s'attarde notre mélancolie? La Terre, dis-tu? Qu'a-t-elle donc jamais réalisé, cette goutte de fange glacée, dont l'Heure ne sait que mentir au milieu du ciel? C'est elle, ne le vois-tu pas, qui est devenue l'Illusion! Reconnais-le, Sara: nous avons détruit, dans nos étranges coeurs, l'amour de la vie [...]. Accepter, désormais, de vivre, ne serait plus qu'un sacrilège envers nous-mêmes. Vivre? les serviteurs feront cela pour nous. (45)

The lovers' suicide is thus a reasoned consequence of a nihilism coupled with the darkest pessimism - of a philosophy which refuses not only the values which support existence, but the fact of existence in itself. Moreover, Axël passes on from this personal desire for death to a final nihilistic wish for the destruction or disappearance in some glorious Wagnerian apotheosis of the whole of the human race:

> Puisse la race humaine, désabusée de ses vaines chimères, de ses vains désespoirs, et de tous les mensonges qui éblouissent les yeux faits pour s'éteindre - ne consentant plus au jeu de cette morne énigme, - oui, puisse-t-elle finir, en s'enfuyant indifférente, à notre exemple, sans t'adresser même un adieu. (46)

(*) This sentiment is echoed by the Archdeacon in his words to Sara: "Mais quel homme, son heure venue, ne reconnaît avoir dépensé sa vie en rêves amers jamais atteints, en vanités qui le déçurent, en successives désillusions, lesquelles, même, n'eurent de réalité, sans doute, qu'en son esprit?" (O.C., IV, pp. 39-40.)

The ultimate conclusion of Axël is clear. Is it also the ultimate conclusion of Villiers himself? It is not possible to be absolutely certain on this point, though A. W. Raitt does not hesitate to conclude in his study of the latter: "C'est ainsi que l'idéalisme intransigeant de Villiers finit par le mener à un nihilisme intégral."(47)

One might be forgiven for regarding a work such as Axël, with its lush romanticism and flights of metaphysical fantasy, at first glance as a piece of fabulous mystification. Yet Villiers was to all appearances sincere in this strangely naïve and confused concoction of philosophies, and the influence of his ideas amongst the symbolists was immense. This influence was particularly strong on the two leading symbolist theoreticians of philosophical 'idealism', Remy de Gourmont and Téodor de Wyzewa(48). But perhaps the writer who presents the most striking resemblances of all with Villiers is Jarry(*). There is in both men the same extreme of aristocratic contempt for the values and jurisdiction of the great mass of their contemporaries; the same attack upon the scientific conceptions of those contemporaries; the same leaning towards, on the one hand, deliberate mystification (in the case of Villiers, in works other than Axël), and, on the other, extremes of poetic fantasy; the same tendency, everywhere in their work, towards what has been variously called a "délire verbal"

(*) Whether or not there is a direct influence of Villiers' works on the young Jarry is impossible to prove beyond doubt, although the extent of the similarities between the two men points overwhelmingly towards such a conclusion. It may be, too - though this is pure speculation -, that once again Gourmont served as a vehicle of transmission. Gourmont knew Villiers well in the last years of his life, and was an enthusiastic supporter of both his work and his ideas.

and "un véritable idéalisme verbal"(*). And most important of all is the resemblance between the two writers on a philosophical plane, in Villiers' philosophy of 'illusionism' and in Jarry's 'pataphysics': the same solipsism; the same reduction to a common level of all doctrines, beliefs and values, and indeed of all conceptions of reality; and the same attempt to construct a purely personal, 'fictional' universe, culminating in a kind of sumptuous apotheosis of nihilism.

Axël has been called "la dernière expression du romantisme européen, le Faust du XIXe siècle finissant"(49). If this is so, then one can only ask what has happened between the days of romanticism and the fin de siècle - between the striving for knowledge, truth and life itself of Goethe's Faust, and the final negation of all these things by Villiers' Axël. Gide, who condemned the symbolists almost without exception for their life-denial and spiritual defeatism, might well have found an epigraph for the movement in the words of Villiers' hero: "Vivre? les serviteurs feront cela pour nous."

(*) Cf. Gourmont, 'Un Carnet de notes sur Villiers de l'Isle-Adam' (L'Ermitage, No. 15, April 1906; repr. in Promenades littéraires, III, Mercure de France, 1963, p. 43): "L'idéalisme de Villiers était un véritable idéalisme verbal, c'est-à-dire qu'il croyait vraiment à la puissance évocatrice des mots, à leur vertu magique: "Tout verbe, dit Axël, dans le cercle de son action, crée ce qu'il exprime."", Cf. also Gourmont's comments in his portrait of Villiers in Le Livre des Masques (1896): "Il croyait davantage aux mots qu'aux réalités, qui ne sont, d'ailleurs, que l'ombre tangible des mots [...]. La puissance des mots, il l'admettait jusqu'à la superstition." (Mercure de France, 1963, p. 59.)

3. PAUL BOURGET, Le Disciple (1889).

Few novels of the time caused such a stir as Bourget's Le Disciple. There can be no question of its influence, both in the field of ideas and in that of literary forms and preoccupations; indeed it has frequently been seen (though in fact this is a gross simplification) as marking the end of the domination in France of 'positivism' or 'scientism', and of its literary counterpart, naturalism. To the generation of 'decadents' and 'symbolists' the novel's thesis came as a complete surprise, so infinitely far removed did it seem from their own preoccupations(*). It

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(*) Cf. the comments of Téodor de Wyzewa, looking back some twenty years: "J'ai conservé un souvenir très présent de l'impression que nous a produite, - à moi-même et à un bon nombre d'autres hommes de lettres de ma génération, - la première lecture de ce Disciple de M. Bourget [...]. C'était par-dessus tout, une impression de surprise, à tel point que nous en oubliions presque d'admirer l'éminente valeur littéraire de l'oeuvre [...]. Ignorant encore, ou du moins ne connaissant que d'une manière assez vague, le défi lancé par l'infortuné Nietzsche à l'antique distinction du bien et du mal, déjà nous étions prêts à lui faire l'accueil qu'avaient reçu de nous, avant lui, les théories "amorales" de Taine et de Renan ou cette captivante doctrine du "culte du moi" qui venait alors de nous être prêchée par M. Barrès avec un mélange délicieux de passion poétique et de détachement. [...] [But] voici que le poète d'Edel attaquait de front l'unique opinion qui nous tînt au coeur: notre vaniteuse conscience d'habiter un monde distinct de celui du "bourgeois", et supérieur à lui." (Introduction to Le Disciple, éd. Nelson, 1911, 1930.)

Similar tributes to the work's impact come from more middle-of-the-road sources also. Cf. Victor Giraud on its importance for himself and his own generation: "Le Disciple est une date dans l'histoire intellectuelle et morale de la France du dernier siècle. Je ne sais si les jeunes gens qui lisent ce livre aujourd'hui se doutent de ce qu'il a été pour nous qui avions vingt ans quand il vit le jour, et même pour quelques-uns de nos aînés. [...] dans la vie intérieure de nombre d'entre nous, ce simple roman a eu une influence unique et décisive [...]. Peu d'ouvrages de cette nature ont eu sur les esprits, sur les âmes, et sur les consciences mêmes, pareille action, ont déterminé pareil ébranlement." (Les Maîtres de l'heure, tome I, Paris, Hachette, 1914, p.277.)

also gave rise to a polemical exchange between Anatole France and Ferdinand Brunetière which remains one of the most celebrated exchanges in literary history. Bourget's chief thesis in the novel is that the teacher or philosopher (or, by extension, the novelist or writer) must accept responsibility not only for the thoughts, but also for the actions of his pupils - whether he has chosen those pupils or not. But behind the moral to be drawn, the novel contains the expression of a number of contemporary philosophical attitudes which are of major significance in the context of this study(*).

The novel contains three chief points of interest for us: the conceptions, or teaching, of the old philosopher Adrien Sixte; the character and the ideas of his 'disciple' Robert Greslou; and - perhaps most important of all - the philosophical assumptions which lie behind Bourget's condemnation of the ideas of both men and of the alleged relationship between them.

First of all, the doctrines of Adrien Sixte. The old philosopher is variously described as "le grand négateur" and "négateur systématique", as a "psychologue nihiliste" and as an "hardi nihiliste d'esprit", and as "cet analyste presque inhumain à force de logique"; his philosophical system is an "audacieux nihilisme" expounded with "une âpreté d'athéisme" of the first order(50). More specifically, he is "le négateur de toute liberté [...] le fataliste qui décomposait la vertu et le vice avec la brutalité d'un chimiste étudiant le gaz [...] le prophète hardi de l'universel mécanisme"(51). Bourget is at pains to stress that

(*) Bourget's concern to emphasize the contemporary aspect of his novel, in fact, extends even to the chapter headings: Sixte is "Un philosophe moderne" (ch.I), and Greslou writes a "Confession d'un jeune homme d'aujourd'hui" (ch. IV).

this 'nihilism' is purely theoretical; he emphasizes time and time again Sixte's total lack of contact with everyday reality, his ignorance of ordinary human feelings and human experience - to the point where, in his naïvety and timidity before the real world, Sixte is quite a comic character; Bourget's portrait tends to caricature, with the (no doubt unforeseen) consequence that the reader is frequently ill-inclined to take Sixte or his ideas at all seriously. But 'nihilistic' Sixte's doctrines (in the eyes of Bourget) nonetheless are, and it is worth examining them in more detail.

Amongst living philosophers, Sixte undoubtedly resembles most closely Taine, although he contains also touches of Ribot and other more minor figures (he also contains a good deal of Spinoza; and Bourget even refers to him on one occasion as "le Spencer français"(52)). But his philosophy is intended by Bourget to represent a summum of contemporary positivist and deterministic doctrines(*), and above all of contemporary 'psycho-physiology'. He draws his inspiration from English empiricism and German metaphysics, from Spinoza and his doctrines of universal necessity, from the natural sciences, and above all from the study of brain physiology(53). His philosophy is expressed in three major works, La Psychologie de Dieu, Anatomie de la Volonté and Théorie des Passions. The first of these propounds the thesis that the idea of God is an illusion, but a necessary product of the psychological laws which govern the operation of the human mind, themselves in turn determined by purely physiological factors(54). The second maintains the absolute necessity or absolute determinism

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(*) But not the doctrines of nineteenth-century 'materialism'; /Cont.

governing every event in the universe, including human actions and volitions; thus the belief in a freedom of choice or of the will in man - and hence in individual responsibility - is merely an illusion: "Tout est nécessaire dans l'âme, même l'illusion que nous sommes libres"(55). This argument is further developed in the third of Sixte's volumes, which attempts to demonstrate the purely physical origins of all mental or spiritual activity. Decomposing the formerly unitary 'âme' of classical psychology into merely a succession of transient phenomena, he maintains that this 'âme' "peut être l'objet d'une connaissance scientifique, à condition d'être étudiée d'après une méthode scientifique". Thus far - as Bourget admits - his doctrine appears indistinguishable from that of a Taine or a Ribot; Sixte's originality consists of two things, a demolition of Spencer's arguments for the notion of the 'Unknowable', and "un exposé très nouveau et très ingénieux des origines animales de la sensibilité humaine"(56) - this in a series of brilliant analyses, including one of 200 pages on love(*).

Such doctrines are indeed to be found in much French

(*) Cf. "Grâce à une lecture immense et à une connaissance minutieuse des Sciences Naturelles, il a pu tenter pour la genèse des formes de la pensée le travail que Darwin a essayé pour la genèse des formes de la vie. Appliquant la loi de l'évolution aux divers faits qui constituent le coeur humain, il a prétendu montrer que nos plus raffinées sensations, nos délicatesses morales les plus subtiles, comme nos plus honteuses déchéances, sont l'aboutissement dernier, la métamorphose suprême d'instincts très simples, transformation eux-mêmes des propriétés de la cellule primitive; en sorte que l'univers moral reproduit exactement l'univers physique et que le premier n'est que la conscience douloureuse ou extatique du second." (Le Disciple, éd. Nelson, pp. 31-32.)

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/ Sixte is sufficiently astute to realise the meaninglessness of the terms 'matter' and 'materialism'.

philosophical writing in the second half of the nineteenth century; something of their impact has been seen in preceding chapters. Moreover, Bourget was not alone in feeling their impact in an ethical, as well as in a religious and metaphysical sphere, to be destructive and even nihilistic. His Sixte professes in fact a complete (theoretical) ethical nihilism; but at the same time he draws a distinction between the ethical outlook of the philosopher-psychologist and that of society at large:

> La société ne peut se passer de la théorie du Bien et du Mal qui pour nous n'a d'autre sens que de marquer un ensemble de conventions quelquefois utiles, quelquefois puériles. [...] pour le philosophe il n'y a ni crime ni vertu. Nos volitions sont des faits d'un certain ordre régis par certaines lois, voilà tout. (57)(*)

Bourget's portrait of Sixte and his philosophy, therefore, though tending to caricature, is rich in contemporary significance. No less interesting are certain of the ideas of Sixte's 'disciple', Greslou. In him Bourget has attempted to portray - and to condemn -, in his own words, "toute une génération de jeunes décadents" and their "pessimisme"(58). The portrait is based - despite Bourget's denials(59) - upon the case of Henri Chambige, a young man of philosophical inclinations and literary ambitions and a

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(*) Cf. also: "Toutes les âmes doivent être considérées par le savant comme des expériences instituées par la nature. Parmi ces expériences, les unes sont utiles à la société, et l'on prononce alors le mot de vertu; les autres nuisibles, et l'on prononce le mot de vice ou de crime." (Le Disciple, éd. Nelson, p. 144.)

The suggestion, in the above-quoted passage, that these 'conventions' may be 'useful' to society, even though for the philosopher they are purely gratuitous, underlines the limits, as well as the purely theoretical nature, of Sixte's nihilism. It is not only that such an idea was inconceivable to Bourget himself which explains this limitation; very few nineteenth-century thinkers whose thought embraced a similar theoretical nihilism went so far as to question the need to preserve 'society' itself, at least in some form or other.

former protégé of Bourget, who in 1888 had created a cause célèbre by killing his mistress and attempting suicide. Barrès, it will be recalled, had written an apology of Chambige, in whom he recognized a kindred spirit, under the title of 'La Sensibilité d'Henri Chambige'; Bourget drew heavily upon this article for his portrait. But Greslou is also based upon a much closer friend of Bourget himself, namely Barrès and his 'Culte du Moi'; Un Homme libre appeared a few months before, and during the writing of, Le Disciple, and numerous terms and phrases in the latter are clearly borrowed directly from Barrès novel(*).

Despite Bourget's claims to the contrary, he does not show us Greslou as being solely the disciple of Sixte; and even where his ideas derive directly from Sixte's works, they are often merely ideas passed on by the older man from a common fund of evolutionary, deterministic and physiological doctrines. Greslou's loss of the Christian faith of his childhood was only in part due to a reading of Sixte; it arose also, amongst other factors, from the exercise of the former's own "esprit critique" and from the discovery of "la littérature contemporaine"(60). He has also read Darwin and discovered that nature is indifferent towards man, and even positively maleficent: it is "l'aveugle, la sourde, la malfaisante nature"(61). He has also discovered that the only law in nature is "la loi du plus fort"(**).

(*) Le Disciple is dated by Bourget "septembre 1888- mai 1889", and the Preface "5 juin 1889"; the novel was published in June of that year. Un Homme libre appeared at the beginning of 1889 - although it is quite possible, and even probable, that Bourget read some or all of the work in manuscript.

(**) Cf. "'C'est la loi du monde', raisonnais-je, 'que toute existence soit une conquête, exécutée et maintenue /Cont.

Whilst astronomy has revealed to him the insignificance of this earth in "l'irrémédiable écoulement"(*). Finally he has learned the (apparently) latest conclusions of science and philosophy - those based on the work of a Claude Bernard and a Pasteur, of Ribot and Taine - concerning the human 'self' - its absence of freedom and its fragmentation(62); and from Sixte above all he has learned of the universal necessity which governs all things, and of "l'origine animale" of all passions(63).

But alongside this, Greslou is haunted, like Chambige, by a belief in the inevitable isolation of the individual self, by a belief that one is "emprisonné, muré dans son Moi", to the point where death alone offers an escape; he has discovered that "nous n'avons rien à nous que nous-même, que le Moi seul est réel"(64). This belief he claims to have found also in the works of Sixte, who had shown "que nous sommes impuissants à sortir du Moi, et que toute relation entre deux êtres repose sur l'illusion, comme le reste"(65). Greslou states also that he has "appris à considérer ma pensée comme la seule réalité avec quoi j'ai à compter, le monde extérieur comme une indifférente et fatale

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(*) Cf. "Je fermais les yeux, et je le sentais rouler, ce globe mortel, à travers le vide infini, inconscient des petits univers qui vont et qui viennent sur lui, comme l'immense espace est inconscient des soleils, des lunes et des terres. La planète roulera ainsi quand elle ne sera plus qu'une boule sans air et sans eau, d'où l'homme aura disparu, comme les bêtes et comme les plantes." (Le Disciple, p. 256.)

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/ par le plus fort aux dépens du plus faible. Cela est vrai de l'univers moral comme de l'univers physique. Il y a des âmes de proie comme il y a des loups, des chats-pards et des éperviers.'" (Le Disciple, p. 244.)

succession d'apparences"(66). The similarity to the metaphysical meanderings of the symbolist generation is evident, and most of all to the ideas of Barrès and Chambige (or Chambige as interpreted by Barrès: Bourget was struck by and made brief notes on Barrès' article on Chambige, which he used in the writing of his novel(67)). Like the latter two, Greslou - struck from an early age by the apparent existence within himself of two 'selves', one which wills and acts, and one which coldly observes and analyses - is obsessed also with the idea of the multiplicity of the self, and with the practice of dédoublement or the successive adoption of different rôles or 'selves'. Chambige had planned to write two novels of self-analysis entitled L'Ame intransmissible and La Dispersion infinitésimale du coeur(68); Greslou had written a similar mémoire with the title: Contribution à l'étude de la multiplicité du Moi(69). Whilst the latter states, in words which seem to echo Barrès:

> Jouer un rôle à côté de ma vraie nature m'apparaissait comme un enrichissement de ma personne, tant j'avais d'instinct le sentiment que se déterminer dans un caractère, une croyance, une passion, c'est se limiter. (70)

The analogy with Barrès, in fact, extends to the very terms used. Greslou speaks of his "rêve d'être à la fois fiévreux et lucide, le sujet et l'objet [...] de mon analyse", and of his "tendance constante à être tout ensemble passionné et réfléchi, à vivre et à me regarder vivre"(71).(*) He

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(*) Cf. Un Homme libre: "le paradis c'est d'être clairvoyant et fiévreux"; "Quand on a l'honneur d'être, à un pareil degré, passionné et réfléchi [...]." (Plon, 1922, pp. 22, 13.)

refers to himself in the terms: "moi qui ne voyais dans le monde extérieur qu'un champ d'expériences où une âme affranchie s'aventure avec prudence, juste assez pour y recueillir des émotions"(72).(*) He draws up a programme which will enable him to "multiplier le plus possible les expériences psychologiques", from which endeavour he will emerge "enrichi d'émotions et de souvenirs"(73). Like Philippe, the hero of Un Homme libre, Greslou transposes "les termes de la religion dans le domaine de sa sensibilité personnelle"; he too studies "les règles monastiques" with a view to applying them "à la culture de sa pensée"; and like Philippe he also has his own lay 'saints' or 'intercessors' - in this case Hobbes, Stendhal, Mill and Sixte - to help him in his meditations(74). Like Barrès' hero, too, he finds himself exiled amongst the 'barbarians':

> j'allais être exilé parmi ceux que j'appelais les barbares. Je donnais ce nom, depuis des années, aux personnes que je jugeais irréparablement étrangères à la vie intellectuelle. (75)

He resolves "à ne vivre qu'en moi [...] à défendre ce moi contre toute intrusion du dehors"(76). Finally, lest the analogy should be lost on the reader, Greslou is made to refer explicitly to his "théories sur le culte du Moi"(77).

Such, then,is Greslou - "ce monstre", as Bourget calls him. But it is not only Sixte who in Bourget's view is a nihilist; so too - and with good reason - is Greslou, with all that he contains of Barrès. This is made explicit in

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(*) Cf. Barrès, 'La Sensibilité d'Henri Chambige': "une âme bien née ne prend plus souci que de se cultiver [...]. Dès lors, une seule chose est réelle, une seule chose importe: le Moi. Le monde extérieur n'apparaît plus que comme un champ d'expériences où l'âme, avec malaise, se hasarde pour trouver des émotions."

Bourget's preface to the novel, in which he evokes two types of young man common in the France of his day. The first is an egotistical and cynical pleasure-seeker, of the type qualified by Alphonse Daudet as a "struggle-for-lifer". The second is a young intellectual, an "épicurien intellectuel et raffiné", with "toutes les aristocraties des nerfs, toutes celles de l'esprit"; he is also a "nihiliste délicat". It is interesting to find Bourget thus discreetly condemning a group of young intellectuals whose chief spokesman was none other than his friend Barrès - and an ethic which he had himself once been attracted to, as the preface (to say nothing of Bourget's earlier work) makes clear:

> Nous le connaissons trop bien, ce jeune homme-là; nous avons tous failli l'être, nous que les paradoxes d'un maître trop éloquent ont trop charmés; nous l'avons tous été un jour, une heure; nous le sommes encore dans nos mauvais moments. (78)(*)

(*) The portrait which Bourget traces of this young man clearly contains a great deal of Barrès: "Ce nihiliste délicat, comme il est effrayant à rencontrer et comme il abonde! A vingt-cinq ans, il a fait le tour de toutes les idées. Son esprit critique, précocement éveillé, a compris les résultats derniers des plus subtiles philosophes de cet âge. Ne lui parlez pas d'impiété, de matérialisme. Il sait que le mot matière n'a pas de sens précis, et il est d'autre part trop intelligent pour ne pas admettre que toutes les religions ont pu être légitimes à leur heure. Seulement, il n'a jamais cru, il ne croira jamais à aucune, pas plus qu'il ne croira à quoi que ce soit, sinon au jeu amusé de son esprit qu'il a transformé en un outil de perversité élégante. Le bien et le mal, la beauté et la laideur, le vice et la vertu lui paraissent des objets de simple curiosité. L'âme humaine tout entière est, pour lui, un mécanisme savant et dont le démontage l'intéresse comme un objet d'expérience. Pour lui, rien n'est vrai, rien n'est faux, rien n'est moral, rien n'est immoral. C'est un égoïste subtil et raffiné dont toute l'ambition, comme l'a dit un remarquable analyste, Maurice Barrès, dans son beau roman de l'Homme libre, - chef-d'oeuvre d'ironie auquel il manque seulement une conclusion, - consiste à "adorer son moi", à le parer de sensations nouvelles. La vie religieuse de l'humanité ne lui est qu'un prétexte à ces sensations-là, comme la vie intellectuelle, comme la vie sentimentale." (Le Disciple, Preface, éd. Nelson, p. 8.)

It is interesting to note how Bourget avoids an explicit condemnation of his friend by refusing to take Un Homme libre completely seriously, seeing it as wholly ironical.

So much for Bourget's condemnation of the attitude of mind and outlook upon life commonly known to his contemporaries as 'dilettantism'. As to the question of the responsibility of Sixte for the ideas and the actions of Greslou, Bourget's attempt to demonstrate this crucial point in the novel is strangely weak. His statement of this relationship is markedly imprecise and melodramatic: Sixte concludes "que cette oeuvre [his philosophy] a empoisonné une âme, qu'elle portait en elle un principe de mort, qu'elle répand à l'heure présente ce principe dans tous les coins du monde"(79). And: "Greslou disait vrai: un maître est uni à l'âme qu'il a dirigée, même s'il n'a pas voulu cette direction, même si cette âme n'a pas bien interprété l'enseignement, par une sorte de lien mystérieux [...]"(80). But even apart from this imprecision, the argument is not borne out by the facts: Sixte, as we have seen, is not Greslou's sole source of inspiration, although he is the chief source. For example, the latter finds in Sixte a justification for considering the 'philosopher' above conventional moral standards(81); and he draws upon the theories of Sixte - especially his analyses of the physiological basis of love - in drawing up his "plan de séduction"; whilst the idea of 'experimenting' upon other human beings in order to increase psychological knowledge is aired by Sixte, although he severely limits its application(*).

(*) Sixte states that the ideal of the scientist is to be able to control the circumstances of any event in such a way and to such a degree as to be able to produce at will that event (or, in the case of human beings, that emotion or reaction). He admits the validity of this principle in the case of "les sentiments moraux", but agrees that its application beyond certain narrow limits would lead to "d'insolubles difficultés de code et de moeurs", adding: "Mon avis est /

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But Greslou also takes inspiration from the work of Claude Bernard and Pasteur: "les savants vivisectent des animaux. N'allais-je pas, moi, vivisecter longuement une âme?"(82). Moreover, Bourget's argument for the responsibility of Sixte breaks down on an even more serious level: Greslou's decision to seduce Mlle de Jussat is only partly a result of his "pure curiosité de psychologue"; it owes at least as much to Greslou's resentment of his social inferiority, his desire to revenge himself upon the girl's brother, Count André; and it owes most of all simply to his own intellectual pride, "le plaisir [...] de manier une âme vivante [...], la vanité d'enrichir [son] intelligence d'une expérience nouvelle"; or, as he also calls it, "l'ivresse de l'amour-propre triomphant"(83). Whilst the means of deceit which he practises - his "faculté de dédoublement", the ability to adopt one rôle after another -, far from deriving from the teaching of Sixte, is on the contrary - as Bourget repeats over and over again - an atavistic "goût natif", a "puissance native", an urge inherent in him from birth(84). Finally, of course, this whole plan of seduction and psychological 'experimentation' in fact comes to nothing, as Greslou falls head over heels in love with the girl, implicitly acknowledging the failure of his cold, calculating methods(85); and it is this situation which is responsible for the final tragedy.

Nevertheless, the thesis which Bourget wishes to propound and to demonstrate holds an importance which transcends

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/ que, pour le moment, nous n'avons, nous autres psychologues, qu'à nous en tenir aux expériences instituées par la nature et le hasard." (Le Disciple, p. 58).

his failure to demonstrate it. Is the philosopher (or the scientist) responsible for the possible harmful or destructive effects of his own pursuit of knowledge and truth; and where such effects exist, does he have a duty towards 'society' to suppress a part or a whole of 'the truth'?(*) Behind Bourget's posing of the problem lies a questioning, and ultimately a rejection, of the whole tradition of the Enlightenment, of two hundred years of unfettered rationalism, of an implicit and optimistic belief in the ultimate rightness, goodness and usefulness of reason and truth. It is the same sentiment as one finds expressed in the lament of the aging Renan: "Qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste?".

Behind Bourget's condemnation of Sixte and Greslou, in fact, lies the essence of a pragmatic view of life (whose emergence is roughly contemporary with the 'pragmatism' of the philosopher William James in America) - or the tendency, yet again, towards the adoption of an 'As if' philosophical position. Such a position is implicit rather than explicit in the novel, although the Preface comes close to formulating it ("La France a besoin que nous pensions tous cela..."). But it is made wholly explicit in the arguments advanced by Bourget's friend and champion of the novel's main thesis, Ferdinand Brunetière. "La Querelle du Disciple", as the polemic to which the novel

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(*) Sixte's denial of any such responsibility represents one extreme form of the argument: "Quant à rejeter sur une doctrine la responsibilité de l'interprétation absurde qu'un cerveau mal équilibré donne à cette doctrine, c'est à peu près comme si on reprochait au chimiste qui a découvert la dynamite les attentats auxquels cette substance est employée." (Le Disciple, pp. 60-61.) Obviously there is a lot of sense in Sixte's argument. Yet in one way Bourget is right: in /

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gave rise came to be known, in fact shows more clearly than anything else this line-up of positions. To France, the inheritor of the absolute confidence of the Enlightenment in reason, such a pragmatism is totally inadmissible. He makes himself the champion of the "droits imprescriptibles" of reason, of thought, of free investigation:

> C'est le droit, disons mieux, le devoir de tout savant qui se fait une idée du monde d'exprimer cette idée, quelle qu'elle soit. Quiconque croit posséder la vérité doit la dire. [...] Les droits de la pensée sont supérieurs à tout. [...] Subordonner la philosophie à la morale c'est vouloir la mort de la pensée, la ruine de toute spéculation intellectuelle, le silence éternel de l'esprit. (86)

Brunetière espouses with equal enthusiasm the implicit position of Bourget, that considerations of 'abstract' truth must be subordinated to practical or moral considerations:

> Fussiez-vous donc assuré que la "concurrence vitale" est la loi du développement de l'homme, comme elle l'est des autres animaux; que la nature, indifférente à l'individu, ne se soucie que des espèces; et qu'il n'y a qu'une raison, ou qu'un droit, qui est celui du plus fort, il ne faudrait pas le dire, puisque, de suivre ces "vérités" dans leurs dernières conséquences, il n'est personne aujourd'hui qui ne voie que ce serait ramener l'humanité à sa barbarie première. Fussiez-vous assuré que l'homme n'est pas libre, et, selon la forte expression de Spinoza, que, lorsqu'il croit l'être, "il rêve les yeux ouverts", il ne faudrait pas le dire, puisque l'institution sociale et la morale entière reposent, comme sur leur simple fondement, sur l'hypothèse ou le postulat de la liberté. (87)

And he even explicitly formulates the view that the only 'truth' is a purely pragmatic one:

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/ certain circumstances, at least, the question of the responsibility of the philosopher or scientist for the consequences to which his work is put can be an exceedingly painful one. It is a question which has forced itself with great immediacy upon a large number of atomic scientists within the last quarter of a century.

> Toutes les fois qu'une doctrine aboutira, par voie de conséquence logique, à mettre en question les principe sur lesquels repose la société, elle sera fausse, n'en faites pas de doute; et l'erreur en aura pour mesure de son énormité la gravité du mal même qu'elle sera capable de causer à la société. (88)

The argument is complicated, of course, by the social and political prises de position of the antagonists. Both Bourget and Brunetière are concerned above all to preserve the values of civilised society - which they identify with the values of a specifically bourgeois society (and also, in the case of Bourget, more and more as his views harden, with the values of an idealised, pre-Revolutionary aristocratic society). France, on the other hand, takes an optimistic, dynamic view of social change, and is prepared to allow the possibility that doctrines which are subversive of existing values and social forms may yet produce new, more positive forms: "C'est la pensée qui conduit le monde. Les idées de la veille font les moeurs du lendemain."(89). Nevertheless it would be false to dismiss the arguments of Bourget, Brunetière and their like as solely the lamentations of frightened bourgeois. Le Disciple and the passionate debates which it aroused remain as a landmark in French intellectual history of the last century; they mark a further significant stage in the crisis of rationalism in these years - deemed yet again to be an inevitable source of nihilism -, in the growing rejection of the concepts of 'reason' and of universal, abstract 'truth', and in the corresponding rise of irrationalist modes of thought - the growing tendency to turn to sources other than those of reason and its offspring, universal, 'scientific' truth, in the search for a foundation for the values men wish to affirm.

4. PAUL CLAUDEL, Tête d'Or, première version (1890).

> Fils d'une époque bourrée, rembourrée de civilisations congestionnées, de bedaines distendues et d'un matelas de doctrines étouffantes au travers desquelles il fallait à tout prix me livrer passage! Sauvage éruption de l'Espérance! Oeuvre non pas de mon imagination, mais de mon coeur, dilation d'un droit intime qui en a assez de la barrière! Revendication sourde une fois de plus de l'individu contre la masse!... (90)

Thus wrote Claudel of his personal involvement in his first play, Tête d'Or. The work is indeed, through all its high-flown rhetoric and the tangled verbiage of its dialogue, a dramatic rendering of the "revendication [...] de l'individu contre la masse". Many of Claudel's symbolist contemporaries saw Tête d'Or as above all an 'anarchist' drama - an interpretation from which Claudel did not demur; in fact, he admitted that he and his friends felt a great deal of sympathy for men such as Ravachol, the archetypal anarchist of the early 1890's. An anarchist Claudel's hero undoubtedly is, but he is more than this too. The play deals with the vital problems of power and authority, of their use and destruction; but more than anarchistic revolt, the mood of the work is one of nihilistic despair.

Claudel has undoubtedly put a great deal of himself into the two chief characters of the play, Tête d'Or and his friend Cébès(*). Cébès is a wretched and unhappy man, one of the chief causes of whose state is that he feels his

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(*) Cf. Jacques Madaule on the autobiographical element in Claudel's early plays: "Jusqu'au Soulier de Satin inclusivement, le drame a été pour Claudel l'expression d'un conflit intérieur, chacune des tendances en lutte les unes contre les autres assumant la voix d'un personnage. Il est trop clair, par exemple, que Simon Agnel et Cébès représentent deux aspects de l'adolescence virile [...]." (Introduction to Théâtre of Claudel, Oeuvres complètes, VI, Gallimard, 1953, p. 8.)

life to be lacking in all direction; his youthful energy is uncanalised, undirected towards any goal. The 'wisdom' he has learned has left him paralysed, for this wisdom is in fact the recognition of the absence of all purpose in life:

> Je ne sais rien et je ne peux rien. Que dire? que faire?
> A quoi emploierai-je ces mains qui pendent? ces pieds qui m'emmènent comme les songes?
> Tout ce qu'on dit, et la raison des sages m'a instruit
> Avec la sagesse du tambour; les livres sont ivres.
> Et il n'y a rien que moi qui regarde... (91)

In his ennui, his sense of moral paralysis, Cébès appears as typical of many a young intellectual of his time; and no less typical is his implicit condemnation of the source of this state - the exercise of critical reason - and desire for submission to some new authority. His is the same cry as the young Barrès' for a "maître [...] axiome, religion ou prince des hommes".

Even more interesting is the character of Simon Agnel, to whom is given the name of "Tête d'Or". Driven to despair by the death first of his wife, then of his friend Cébès, he becomes convinced of the meaninglessness and wretchedness of existence. His first reaction is a stunned indifference before its "bouffonnerie": "Pourquoi vivre? Il m'est indifférent de vivre ou d'être mort. - Cela me fait mal!". But then he turns, in the face of a meaningless and worthless world, to an exaltation of himself; he will mould this world according to his own will; he will establish his domination over all men, or die in the process:

> Aujourd'hui!
> Aujourd'hui est venu que je dois montrer qui je suis! Il y a moi! il faut!

> Seul! eux tous! Je marcherai, je meurtrirai le mufle même de la bestialité d'un poing armé! Je parlerai devant cette assemblée de saligauds et de lâches; ou je mourrai, ou je m'établirai mon propre empire! (92)

Demanding to be recognized as absolute dictator of the State, he demands also a total freedom for himself - a freedom which requires total submission to his will on the part of all others:

> A cette heure je parlerai ouvertement. Je veux régner. [...]
> Je suis né pour être libre, et ne croyez pas que cette nuque soit domptée!
> L'EMPEREUR: - Comment donc peux-tu être libre?
> TÊTE D'OR: - En cela que quelque chose ne m'est pas soumis, je ne suis pas libre. Si je commande!
> L'EMPEREUR: - Et penses-tu que des hommes comme toi t'obéissent?
> TETE D'OR: - <u>Que rien ne soit hors de moi! Je m'emparerai de tout pouvoir de faire et de ne pas faire</u>. (93)

To the Emperor, spokesman for 'common sense', for a 'rational' world, and for tradition, claiming to be heir to the accumulated wisdom of the past, Tête d'Or replies simply: "Je ne suis pas venu pour cela". He sees that in the world at present "tout n'est que désordre", yet he is not concerned with the happiness of men. On the contrary, he has only contempt for them: "Vous qui ne valez rien, vous tous ensemble". Called upon to respect the laws of the State and "l'autorité antique", Tête d'Or has nothing but sneers of contempt for those laws, "ce papier gris". His claim to domination is not even based upon his recent military victory as Commander-in-Chief of the army, by which he has saved the State; it is based on nothing but the brute force of his demand - a demand for absolute domination:

> Cependant ne me refusez pas ce que je réclame, qui est Tout! [...]
> Mérité? - Qu'ai-je mérité en vous sauvant [...]?

> Oubliez que je suis Tête d'Or et chef d'armée, je l'ordonne!
> Et cette victoire dont le sommeil même ne me sépare pas encore!
> Que je paraisse à l'instant devant vous, sans nom, sans titres: je réclame la toute-puissance! [...]
> Et je m'en emparerai! (94)

Thus he assumes the throne and, when the Emperor tries to stop him, kills him - proclaiming to the crowd:

> C'est moi qui l'ai tué! Et voyez,
> Si vous appelez quelque chose
> Vos droits, vos intérêts,
> Vos désirs, vos idées, vos habitudes, votre famille,
> Je les foule sous mes pieds comme ce corps mort!
> Qu'ils soient comptés comme rien! (95)

What is more, the language of Tête d'Or reveals a religious element in this will to dominate. In terms which to the Christian can only appear blasphemous, he seems to assume the rôles of both God and Christ at the same time:

> TETE D'OR: - A la fin, vous qui êtes là, ne reconnaîtrez-vous pas qui je suis?
> L'UN D'EUX: - Seigneur, pardonne-nous.
> TETE D'OR: - Je ne suis pas venu comme l'humble dieu de la soupe,
> Bienveillant, clignant des yeux dans la vapeur de la viande et du chou. [...]
> Je vous propose de vous laver de votre honte et de vous lever de votre bassesse,
> Et de vous venger d'un sort dur et méprisable [...].(96)

And like Christ, he bids the populace: 'Follow me!':

> Et si quelqu'un est las de cette vie de tailleur, qu'il me suive!
> S'il en est
> Qu'indigne cette vile et monotone après-midi, reste de la digestion et veille du somme, qu'il vienne à moi! (97)

The implications is clear. In a world from which not only God, but any form of transcendence is lacking, man - in this instance Tête d'Or - will take the place of God; he will become a law unto himself. The nihilism of Tête d'Or could not be more evident.

For his followers, Tête d'Or becomes a guide and leader;

to their lives he gives direction and - in this sense at least - apparent 'meaning'. But he himself is guided only by his own dreams, is driven on only by the force of his own will to realise those dreams. With the immediate objective of further conquest and domination before his mind's eye, he rushes savagely onwards; but when impending defeat heralds the smashing of his grandiose dreams, all sense of purpose seems to vanish. Believing his army to have been defeated, his empire lost, his dreams disintegrate, and in a frenzied death-wish Tête d'Or rushes into battle in a deliberate act of suicide. Whilst with the apparent death of their leader, the 'raison d'être' of a whole world, the army of Tête d'Or falls into total disorientation, and men likewise rush in despair into furious battles aiming at a collective suicide. Amongst the many figures who rush across the stage in this final act, that of 'the deserter' is particularly significant: he is a Tête d'Or in miniature (he too is driven to despair by the loss of his wife, friends and everything he possessed in the world), but without the passion and heroism of the latter: a little vulgar nihilist.

In fact, Tête d'Or has not succeeded in killing himself. He recovers consciousness, only to once again seek voluntary death (he rips off his bandages and lets his wounds bleed freely). Before he dies, he embarks upon a long self-questioning, realising the vanity of all his dreams - including the dream of 'becoming God':

> O âme, pour qui rien n'existait de trop grand! et voyez, ces mains,
> Ces mains empoignent le vide! [...]
> Je ne peux pas! je ne peux pas! Je ne suis pas un dieu!
> En quoi ai-je manqué? Où est ma faute? (98)

And the play concludes with a Shakespearian meditation upon the vanity of all human effort:

> Trois rois morts! des événements étranges!
> Les lois de l'usage brisées, la faiblesse humaine
> surmontée, l'obstacle des choses
> Dissipé! Et notre effort arrivé à une limite vaine
> Se défait de lui-même comme un pli. (99)

To this, the converted Claudel would doubtless have added: the vanity of all purely human effort. Jacques Madaule, too, follows Claudel in giving a specifically Christian interpretation to the work: Tête d'Or is "le drame de la possession du monde [...]. Dans Tête d'Or, il s'agissait de savoir l'usage qu'un chrétien peut faire de cet appétit"; and in the character of Tête d'Or Claudel has attempted, according to Madaule, to portray a man "possédé[s] par le désir de l'infini, rongé[s] par une insatisfaction essentielle. Insatisfaction qui ne peut trouver son terme qu'en Dieu seul"(100). But in the original version of the work, at least, this solution is not even hinted at: God remains wholly outside of the work itself, and nor is his existence even implied. Tête d'Or portrays in fact the drama of man without God, of a universe totally devoid of any realm of transcendence. It portrays a situation that is wholly nihilistic.

Strange as such a comparison may at first appearance seem, there is a striking parallel between Claudel's Tête d'Or and Jarry's Ubu. When the former, immediately before killing the Emperor, declares at the apotheosis of his nihilistic self-assertion: "Que rien ne soit hors de moi! Je m'emparerai de tout pouvoir de faire et de ne pas faire!", one is reminded of Ubu's savage desire to procure for

himself "toute la phynance" and of the pronouncement which constitutes his best characterisation: "Je tuerai tout le monde et je m'en irai". In fact, Claudel and Jarry are both portraying the same fundamental philosophical situation; the difference between them lies only in the manner of treatment: in the case of Claudel, on a would-be poetic and symbolic plane; in the case of Jarry, by farce and monstrous puppets (a demonstration, perhaps, of the 'absurd' by the absurd). For the universe of both Tête d'Or and of Ubu Roi is one from which not only God - the specifically Christian God - has vanished, but from which any form of transcendence, any source of values outside of the individual, any point of reference outside of individual man himself, is lacking. Tête d'Or acts only in the name of his own dreams, his will to power and domination; Ubu in the name of his physical appetites. But in both cases, each is acting only in the name of himself; each is his own end, and the freedom which both demand is the freedom to stand at the centre of an absurd universe and to destroy everything which stands in their way. Both are essentially - one might almost say, archetypal - nihilists.

Men have, of course, always to a degree taken themselves as ends - both their own material ambitions, their own appetites (Ubu has always existed), and their own dreams, or the realisation of those dreams. What is new in the situation which Claudel here portrays is that in this universe there is no other possibility but such a course of action. Absolutely nothing is 'given', there is no source of values apart from each individual's own appetites or

dreams. Such a vision is an extreme one, and one may well feel that Claudel is 'cheating' here: that such a portrait is coloured by the radical dualism (reminiscent of Pascal) of his Christian view of the world: everything with God, nothing without God. One may argue that the disappearance or absence of this particular conception of God does not mean the loss or absence of all 'meaning' and values from the world. But at least it remains the case that, as has been seen several times in the course of this study, such a view is not peculiar to Claudel alone - that it is shared by others without a theological axe to grind. Moreover, at the time of writing Tête d'Or, Claudel's conversion was by no means completed(*); and whilst we need not take too literally the polemical denunciations by the later Claudel of the "bagne matérialiste" in which he lived in the years before his conversion(**), there can be no doubt that the work does reflect Claudel's own youthful sense of 'déracine-

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(*) The work was written in 1889, and published in 1890. Although the process of conversion had begun as early as Christmas 1886, it was not until the Christmas of 1890 that Claudel took the step of fully re-entering the Church.

(**) Cf. amongst several similar references, the following passage cited by Henri MONDOR (Claudel plus intime, Paris, 1960): "Je sortais enfin de ce monde hideux, de Taine, de Renan et des autres Molochs du XIXe siècle, de ce bagne, de cette affreuse mécanique entièrement gouvernée par des lois parfaitement inflexibles et pour comble d'horreur connaissables et enseignables [sic]."
Clearly, Claudel's account of things will not do. The view of the universe which he here attacks - a belief in immutable universal laws and in the explicability of the universe - was the credo of the men of the Enlightenment, and a source, for them, of supreme optimism. Why does Claudel react so differently? Is it the very concept of rational explanation which so fills him with horror? In any case, the reason for his reaction to the situation he describes is to be sought at least as much in himself as in that situation.

ment' in the Paris of the time, his philosophical disorientation, his own spiritual and moral anarchy.

Finally, in the nihilism portrayed in Tête d'Or, one can see an uncanny premonition of the twentieth-century drama of the rise of the totalitarian State - of the seizure and display of naked power for its own sake and with no other justification than that of brute force, and of the wilful renunciation of freedom and absolute submission which will be demanded of the individual. The work throws some light on the psychology of that will to power and of the nature of that submission. It may also throw some light upon the psychology of Claudel's own submission to an absolute and authoritarian (if scarcely totalitarian) Church.

Appendix to chapter XI.

In this survey of the nihilism of the years 1880-1900 as it finds expression in the literature of the time, other works and authors might also have been discussed. These would, it is true, have added little that was new to the general pattern already established; nevertheless, it may be useful to mention briefly some of them.

In addition to Tête d'Or, Claudel's second play La Ville, written only a year after the former, is also of interest. Both plays portray fundamentally the same philosophical situation; but in the second of the two it is not merely one individual who wallows in this nihilism, but a whole civilisation. In the conflict shown between bourgeois and workers, we see that both groups share, at bottom, the

same (at least implicitly) nihilistic philosophy. Other early works of Huysmans, too, might have been discussed, in particular the novels A vau-l'eau (1882) and En Ménage (1881); Huysmans himself described the latter - which he later declared to be among his favorite works - as "un chant de nihilisme, un chant encore assombri par des éclats de gaîté sinistre et par des mots d'un esprit féroce"(101). As for Bourget, an examination of his early works, and in particular his volumes of verse - La Vie inquiète (1875), Edel (1878), Les Aveux (1882) - reveals a young man who is overtly and markedly sympathetic towards the very 'decadence' and nihilism which he later so strongly condemns.

Edouard Rod's novel of 1885, La Course à la mort, might also have been discussed. The work offers, as Rod himself put it, "l'analyse d'un état d'âme plus ou moins général"(102) - a portrait of the Schopenhauerian aesthete, 'decadent' and 'dilettante' of the mid-1880's who meditates languidly on the 'evil' and 'absurdity' of existence and dreams impossible dreams of the end of all life, "l'anéantissement de l'espèce"(103). In the work of Pierre Loti, too, can be found similar expressions of the vanity of all activity and the illusoriness of all goals, albeit frequently overlaid with a rather sickly melancholy and morbid sensibility. The following well-known passage from Aziyadé (1879) contains the expression of an ethical nihilism whose origins Loti attributes to his loss of the faith of his childhood:

> Il n'y a pas de Dieu, il n'y a pas de morale, rien n'existe de tout ce qu'on nous a enseigné à respecter; il y a une vie qui passe, à laquelle il est logique de demander le plus de jouissances possible, en attendant l'épouvante finale qui est la mort...;

> j'ai pour règle de conduite de faire toujours ce qui me plaît, en dépit de toute moralité, de toute convention sociale. Je ne crois à rien ni à personne, je n'aime personne ni rien; je n'ai ni foi ni espérance. (104)

On a totally different plane, it is clear that Mallarmé as a young man (in particular, in the years 1865-66) passed through a period of metaphysical nihilism similar to that of his friend Henri Cazalis, though a nihilism largely determined by the mdical nature of the dualistic view of the world formerly embraced: the discovery of the illusoriness of one term of this dualism - namely, his religio-metaphysical Rêve or Idéal - entails the 'néant' of all things, the loss of all 'meaning'. And like his friend, too, Mallarmé reacts to this situation by declaring the need for man - and in particular the poet - to assume the mantle of a now vanished deity and to 'create' 'meaning' anew. (105)

Less rarified, and in many respects amongst the most instructive of all, are the cases of the young Romain Rolland and Charles Maurras, who follow a philosophical evolution strikingly similar to that of Barrès. Rolland's loss of his adolescent religious faith is followed by a total metaphysical débâcle; in this situation, as was the case with Barrès (and with Claudel, his fellow-pupil at Louis-le-Grand), the 'official' secular ethical teaching of the Third Republic failed to impress itself upon his mind. As with Barrès, too, his attempt at metaphysical reconstruction was of a non-intellectual nature: spurning rational argument, he takes as a starting-point for the elaboration of a new metaphysics the feeling or sensation of 'existence' - subsequently identified with 'Being', and ultimately with 'God'. In contrast, however, to that of Barrès, the 'ground'

in which Rolland finds his spiritual roots is a universal - and not a limited, merely nation-based - one(106).

As for Maurras, it is not surprising that he later forbade his friends and disciples to republish any of his writings prior to the year 1893. An examination of these reveals Maurras also to have passed through a phase of youthful nihilism which, if less profound and less explicit than that of Barrès, was of a similar type. Philosophy, he himself later confessed, was the passion of his youth(107); and between the years 1884/85 and 1891/92, Maurras, having lost his Catholic faith, searched around passionately for some new metaphysical and ethical principle or foundation - only to conclude at the non-existence of any 'given' source of direction and values, and at the total inability of 'reason' to establish any such principle. For some years, like Barrès, Maurras floundered in a nihilistic impasse, afflicted by a sense of universal 'absurdity' and of moral paralysis(*). Attracted for a time by an 'As if' philosophy advocating the acceptance of "[les] illusions qui nous consolent [...] et [les] mensonges miséricordieux"(108), Maurras ultimately came to see the only way out of this impasse in a conscious and - in strict philosophical terms - arbitrary « choice of some direction, some goal to strive for, some set of values. As two important articles of 1896

(*) The terms in which, looking back, he describes this state, though coloured by political bias and emotion, are revealing all the same: "Notre génération donnait certainement le fruit parfait de tout ce que devait produire l'anarchie [the term for Maurras indicates lack of direction - including philosophical direction] du XIXe siècle, et nos jeunes gens du XXe se feraient difficilement une idée de son état d'insurrection, de dénégation capitale. Un mot abrégera: il s'agissait pour nous de dire non à tout.[...] Le mot de scepticisme n'est pas suffisant pour qualifier ce mélange d'incuriosité /

Cont.

expressed this view: "Bien qu'au fond tout se vaille, il faut choisir si l'on veut vivre", and "il vaut mieux s'appuyer sur des principes faux, mais bien liés entre eux, que de n'en avoir pas"(109). The particular choice which Maurras made is a matter of history. Such was the philosophical evolution and foundation of this self-styled champion of 'order' and 'reason'.

Cont. from previous page:
/ frondeuse avec le délire de l'examen [...]. Un <u>à quoi bon?</u> réglait le compte universel des personnes, des choses et des idées. C'était le néant même, senti et vécu." (<u>L'Etang de Berre</u>, Paris, 1915, pp. 244-245.)

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(8) ibid., p. 70.

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Chapter XII: CONCLUSION.

Nihilism, in one form or another, can appear, and no doubt has appeared, at many moments in history. Nietzsche saw in the more radical forms of mediaeval Christianity, with their total denial of 'this world' and its values, a form of nihilism; yet this is a nihilism which, ultimately, is saved by its affirmation of another world beyond. A similar nihilism can be seen in one side of the radical dualism of Pascal: the situation of man in a world without God, as he sees it, is wholly nihilistic; but again, Pascal is saved ultimately by his very belief in God, or by his 'leap of faith'. The nihilism which appears in France towards the end of the nineteenth century is a new phenomenon, with roots deep in the philosophical situation of the age as a whole, the culmination of a long process of 'liberation' of man from the shackles of religious belief, of tradition, of submission to any force outside of himself. This nihilism, moreover, is by no means limited to France. Dostoevsky in Russia, and above all Nietzsche in Germany, attempted to analyse the phenomenon which they saw growing to increasing prominence in the world around them. In the "tout est permis" of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, Camus has seen the true beginning of "l'histoire du nihilisme contemporain"(1). Nietzsche's "God is dead" was an acknowledgement not just of the decline of Christian belief, but of the collapse of all Absolutes, of all transcendental justification for moral values as for existence itself - the recognition of a metaphysical and ethical 'void' which

he saw facing Western civilisation as a whole.

It is true that there is not in these years, any more than there has been in more recent times, any completely coherent or logically consistent philosophy of nihilism. The nihilism we have studied appears in the form of a 'standpoint', an 'outlook', a 'view of the world'. It is, moreover, a phenomenon which reaches conscious formulation only in those of a certain abstract turn of mind, amongst the 'metaphysically minded'. Nonetheless, whilst this may underline its limits, the nihilism of this age remains a factor of considerable importance - one whose significance and consequences it has been the aim of this thesis to demonstrate.

The long-range source of this nihilism is doubtless to be found in the weakening of the hold over the European mind of Christianity and the Christian world-view. But its immediate sources are to be found in a tradition of critical rationalism stretching from the Enlightenment to the present day, and above all in the scientific and scientifically-based philosophical thought of the age - as a consequence of which we see a decline not only of Christianity and its world-view, but also of many of those 'substitute-Gods' or absolutes which had taken the place of Christian belief: the belief in 'Nature', in 'Reason', in 'Progress', and even - paradoxically - the belief in 'Science' itself.

For these developments, the materialistic and deterministic doctrines of the physical sciences, particularly insofar as these were applied not only to a description of the physical universe but to mankind also, bear a share of the responsibility (the doctrine of universal determinism is

described by Bourget as "une doctrine qui enveloppait le germe du nihilisme le plus sombre et le plus inguérissable"(2)). Nineteenth-century astronomy, too, played its part, through its increasing revelation of the immensity of the universe and of the insignificance of man's place in it. But it was above all developments in the biological sciences - and in particular the impact of the ideas of Darwin - which lay behind this weakening and destruction of belief. This is not to overlook the positive effects of Darwinism; for many, perhaps most, men in the second half of the nineteenth century, Darwin's theory of evolution appeared to strengthen existing concepts of inevitable, and even automatic, progress. But the negative effects were considerable too. Darwin's ideas appeared to strengthen the mechanistic and deterministic doctrines of the physical sciences in their application to man as well as to inanimate nature. They also, by completing the 'reintegration' of man into nature, appeared to deprive man of his former privileged status as a being apart - thereby completing a process of displacement of man from the centre of the universe which had begun in the Renaissance, with the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo. Thirdly, Darwin's theories appeared to many men to destroy all concepts of finality in the workings of nature - thereby ushering in a vision not only of man as a totally insignificant being, but of a world without purpose, of an 'absurd' universe. Finally, Darwin's explanation of the mechanism of the evolutionary process - the internecine struggle for existence, or "survival of the fittest" as Spencer put it - seemed to destroy any foundation <u>in nature</u> for the concepts

of good and evil, of justice and morality - and thereby to shatter the faith of the nineteenth century in 'Nature' as a source of ethical and metaphysical belief, leading to the proclamation, as the century drew to a close, of "la banqueroute de la nature".

But the full realisation of these implications was not immediate. The 'positivist' age as a whole, for all its professed metaphysical scepticism, continued to hold to certain key concepts of an earlier era - amongst them, belief in the 'meaningfulness' of existence and in the essential rightness and rationality of the natural order. It was above all the last few decades of the century which saw the decline of such concepts, as a realisation of the implications of the above scientific concepts became progressively more widespread.

At the same time, paradoxically, that very faith in 'Science', which for many men had taken the place of traditional Christianity, was itself progressively undermined as a result of the conceptions of science itself of the world and of man. 'Science', it had been widely believed, would assume the rôle of religion or metaphysics by itself providing an 'explanation' of the 'enigma' of existence and a source of moral obligation and values; whatever was not yet known would be known in the near or not-too-distant future. But now that same science seemed to have come to the conclusion and to show that there was no explanation - at least in terms of 'meaning' or 'purpose'- and no source of values to be found; that the universe presented merely a spectacle of blind, purposeless activity, and nature a spectacle of

negation of all morality. This failure of 'Science' to keep its 'promises' led increasingly, as the century drew to a close, to a proclamation - alongside that of "la banqueroute de la nature" - of "la faillite de la science".

How do those writers-intellectuals studied in detail here fit into this perspective? The deduction of a nihilistic view of the world from the conceptions of contemporary science is most immediately apparent in Lahor and Laforgue - although it is present in others also. Of the greatest impact on Lahor are the mechanistic conceptions of the physical sciences, the deterministic and materialistic views of contemporary physiology, the revelations of astronomy, and the theories of Darwin whose influence is everywhere apparent in his work. The result is a nihilistic sense of the 'absurdity' of all existence and the illusoriness of all values, coupled with a profound pessimism - a view of the squalor and wretchedness of human life. An almost exactly similar outlook is produced in Laforgue, following the destruction, by 'science', of his adolescent religious faith. This time it is above all the revelations of astronomy, closely followed by the ideas of Darwin, which are responsible for this development - although the doctrine of universal determinism, in particular in the form of biological determinism in human beings, is also important, and achieves increasing prominence as his ideas and work mature. In his later work, also, a prominent theme is that of the multiplicity and unreality of the 'self', rendering decision and moral responsibility impossible - a consequence of the views of contemporary psychology transmitted in

particular by Taine and Hartmann. In Barrès, too, can be seen the impact of the materialistic, deterministic and evolutionary doctrines of contemporary science, although here the doctrines and conclusions of science are transmitted not so much directly (though there is some direct influence) as through the medium of Barrès' chosen philosophers, Taine and Renan. But the result is the same: Barrès is left with a conviction of the destruction of all metaphysical, religious and ethical ideals, whittled away by the combined effects of scientific advance and of a critical rationalism, and a conviction of the 'absurdity' of all existence. In fact, he comes as a young man to see Renan - the very man who had once, for many, incarnated the 'religion of science' - as the exponent of an urbane but radical nihilism(*). As for Jarry, evidence is lacking of a <u>direct</u> influence upon him of particular scientific doctrines or conceptions; but the metaphysical and ethical <u>débâcle</u> to which, in the eyes of many, the latter appeared to have led, is presupposed in all his work and thought. Amongst these four writers, too, the theme of the 'indifference' and 'amorality' of nature, and of the impossibility of finding in 'nature' any foundation for values, is to be found explicitly formulated in the work of Lahor, Laforgue and Barrès, while it remains unavowed in, but essential to, the thought of Jarry. Whilst on a more general plane, the whole 'decadent' cult of

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(*) Barrès' development is interesting in another respect also: in him we can see an example of the failure of the purely secular, 'abstract' ethical values of the 'official' teaching of the Third Republic to gain a hold over the mind and to effectively counter the loss of religious and metaphysical belief.

perversion and artificiality - exemplified in Huysmans' A rebours - is an expression of this sense of 'failure' or 'bankruptcy'.

Obviously, the spread of such ideas must not be exaggerated, and no doubt most men, up to 1914 at least, continued to be swept along by a continuing belief in 'progress' and a broad historical optimism, feeling no need to call into question the basic premises of their existence. On the surface, the age remained one of rollicking optimism and self-confidence. But increasingly in the years around 1880, a significant minority, particularly amongst the 'jeunesse intellectuelle' of France, appeared to succumb to what was commonly seen and described as a mood of profound 'pessimism'. But this 'pessimism' is an extremely ambiguous phenomenon; indeed, for many the term expressed a view of the absence of all finality in the universe, of the 'absurdity' of existence, of the absence of justification for all values. The philosophy of Schopenhauer, it was widely believed, was in large part responsible for the spread of such ideas. But in fact the popularity of Schopenhauer was at least as much a symptom as a cause; it owed much to the fact that his philosophy appeared to confirm a number of major conclusions of contemporary science and philosophy, and above all the theories of Darwin - to the point where the ideas of the two men were frequently confused! In particular, Schopenhauer appeared to confirm Darwin's conception of life as a brutal struggle for survival; he helped to precipitate a crisis in ethical thought based on the concept of 'nature'; and his vision of a universe

dominated by blind Will, by ceaseless activity without any goal, confirmed the picture, which Darwinism had helped to form, of an 'absurd' universe. Beyond this, moreover, the very starting-point of Schopenhauer's whole philosophy is a questioning of the 'justification' for existence itself - a question echoed by Heidegger some one hundred years later in the terms: "Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?"(3). In fact, Schopenhauer goes beyond this 'mise en question' to a declaration that non-being is preferable to being - to a negation not merely of particular values, but of the 'value' of existence itself. He advocates the eventual extinction of all life (or at least of human life) in a conclusion which might reasonably be described as one of 'integral nihilism'. Amongst those writers and works studied here, there is a possible influence of the ideas of Schopenhauer upon Lahor, and certainly a similarity of ideas on several major issues; a marked influence of Schopenhauer, and of his part-disciple Hartmann, upon Laforgue; and a fairly certain influence upon the young Barrès. Whilst similar visions of or calls for the extinction of the whole human race are to be found, at least momentarily and in their literary works, in Lahor, Laforgue, Jarry, Huysmans, Villiers, Rod, and others besides.

From Schopenhauer, too, many amongst the symbolists claim to deduce an 'idealism' which tends towards, and is frequently little more than, a simple solipsism - a doctrine affirming that the 'self' alone is real and that the external world is in some way an 'illusion' - a form in

fact of what has been defined as 'ontological nihilism'. Here again, in reality, there is a conjunction between the ideas of Schopenhauer and philosophical developments in France itself. The distant, and not-so-distant, origins of this solipsism are to be found, firstly, in certain trends in philosophical psychology - in particular, the work of Taine, Ribot and others -, leading to an extreme form of epistemological scepticism which many symbolists push over into an often crude, nihilistic solipsism; secondly, in the ideas of the 'anti-positivist reaction' of the period, and in particular the latter's questioning of the extent to which 'science' gives us a true picture of reality and of the reliability of sense-perception as a source of knowledge of the world. It can also be seen as a consequence - and indeed as a further cause - of the apparent collapse of 'objective' meaning and values. Amongst those writers influenced, at least for a time, by this solipsistic tendency one can list the young Gide, Gourmont, Rod, Moréas, Laforgue, Barrès, Mallarmé, Mauclair, Wyzewa, Villiers and Jarry. Villiers develops the idea that 'reality' and 'truth' are creations not only of the 'self', but of the <u>will</u>. Barrès' 'Culte du Moi' contains a tendency towards this solipsism, in its falling back upon the 'self' as the sole remaining source of value and meaning in the world and as the instrument which <u>shapes</u> (if not actually <u>creates</u>) 'reality', and in its consequent assertion of the relativity of 'reality', or at least of all conceptions of it. In the work of Jarry are to be found amongst the most extreme developments of all, deriving directly from the above

critique of science and scientific knowledge, and from the solipsistic doctrines to which the latter (no doubt inadvertently) helped to contribute. Whilst even Lahor puts forward quite independently the idea, based on his studies in the physiology of the brain and nervous system, of the 'illusoriness' of the external world. Not surprisingly, the fundamental image or myth of symbolism - from Villiers' Axël and Mallarmé's Igitur to Jarry's inverted Faust - remains that of Narcissus; it is an image which dominates the work of Jarry, the whole of Barrès' 'Culte du Moi', and which also plays a significant rôle in the work of Laforgue.

The aesthetic consequences of such a metaphysics - the total creative freedom allowed the artist - are clear. But such doctrines are difficult to hold in the face of 'reality'. They must be seen as in part the expression and consequence of factors of a political and social order also - of a rejection of existing social and political realities and as the expression of (to use contemporary jargon) a deep-seated desire to 'opt out'. The young writers of the 'decadent' and 'symbolist' generations appear, in fact, to have suffered more than most from an acute sense of alienation from the values of the world around them, from a sense of being 'cut off', isolated, and from an inability to identify with any social group or class save the small and isolated artistic and intellectual élite to which they themselves belonged. This is the situation which finds expression in the theme, running through all of Laforgue's work, of the 'outsider', the man cut off from the world

around him by his inability to share common beliefs and values, and by his rejection of the hypocrisy and hollow routine of bourgeois existence. A similar theme runs through the work of Barrès, first in the form of the opposition between his sensitive, intellectual 'self' and the 'barbarians', and then in that of the déraciné. Whilst Jarry's near-absolute hostility towards and rejection of the values of the world around him - with the exception of a small élite of kindred spirits - can be seen not only throughout his work, but in his life - and the rôle he adopted - as well(*). In all of these men, the lack of a sense of social 'rootedness' and 'justification' is a contributing factor to their nihilism. It strengthens (and is strengthened by?) the lack of belief in any metaphysical 'justification' for their lives: existence as a whole, individual existences, and the values of society, are all felt to be gratuitous, without justification, 'absurd'. The only one, amongst the four writers whose work is studied in detail here, to whom these considerations do not apply, is Lahor - in whose 'integration' into and practical, everyday acceptance of the values of bourgeois society is to be found the explanation of the purely 'theoretical' nature of his nihilism, and the source of a number of inherent contradictions in his thought.

The above situation also finds expression, in the 1880's, in the proclamation of the 'decadence' - the disintegration and imminent collapse - of modern civilisation. Laforgue and Barrès, amongst others, both explicitly formulate such a view, and both attribute this disintegration to the undermining of the common metaphysical, religious

(*) The same expression of disgust for the dominant values / Cont.

and ethical foundations of Western civilisation. In the 1890's, the sense of alienation discussed above finds expression in open declarations of sympathy for the 'enemies' of society, the bomb-throwing anarchist terrorists of these years. In symbolist milieux, numerous writers express sympathy for 'anarchist' ideas, Barrès (whose 'anarchism' is embraced above all for its powers of destruction - though on an intellectual rather than a physical plane) and Claudel amongst them; and some even go so far as to equate 'symbolism' and 'anarchism'. But there is anarchism and anarchism. Beyond the wave of present destruction, many dreamed of the birth of a more just, more perfect society. Others were inspired by no such ideal, and were as contemptuous of the ideals of 'regeneration' of certain anarchists as of the bourgeois ideology and institutions they sought to destroy. Of these, Jarry is one of the most striking examples. The deliberately anti-social, anarchistic individualism of the age is carried by him to an extreme, and forms one of the sources of his nihilism. His Ubu - hurled in the face of the bourgeois public to the almost unanimous applause of the symbolists - is the expression of a sheer destructive nihilism, and an image of Man stripped to his physical appetites, representing a vision of a world in which all values, ideals and beliefs, all vestiges of 'civilisation', have been destroyed.

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So much for the causes of, and forms taken by, the nihilism of the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

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/ of the contemporary world, and of a desire to 'opt out' or escape, can be seen in Huysmans' A rebours and Villiers' Axël.

More interesting, in many respects, are the reactions to and attempts to overcome it. It is here, moreover, that differences begin to emerge - though there is still a good deal of common ground.

One idea common to a number of the writers studied here is that, in a godless universe, man can and must take the place of God - must 'become God'. The idea finds expression in the work of Lahor (as also in the thought of his friend Mallarmé, for whom 'poetry' must fulfil the function of religion or metaphysics), in that of Villiers, and receives its most extravagant developments in the work of Jarry; while there is even a hint of this idea in the 'deification' by Barrès, in a godless world, of the 'self'. Such an identification, however, in no way constitutes a solution to the problem of nihilism. The fact can be clearly seen in the work of Jarry, and in Claudel's Tête d'Or, which portrays the exaltation of the individual 'self', through conquest and domination, in the face of an 'absurd' world; Tête d'Or takes the place of God, becoming a law unto himself. But - as the results show - 'God' so conceived is in fact no less a nihilist than man.

Most attempts at a solution, however, are on a less exalted plane. Lahor is typical of many such attempts. From his philosophy of the 'néant' of existence, he moves first to the formulation of a purely hedonistic philosophy, a cult of living intensely which seems to anticipate the ideas of Camus in Le Mythe de Sisyphe. And from here, he goes on to the adoption of an 'As if' philosophy: faced with the 'meaninglessness' and 'unreality' of the world, men must nevertheless act as if the latter were 'meaningful'

and 'real', and certain values 'justified'. The adoption of such an 'As if' philosophy or position - involving the necessary acceptance of 'illusion', of 'myth', of 'prejudice', of the 'useful lie' - becomes in fact increasingly common in these years. Edouard Rod gave a succinct summing-up of a widely held view when he wrote in his novel of 1889, Le Sens de la vie: "Ceux-là sont les bienfaiteurs de l'humanité qui la trompent"(4). A tendency, explicit or implicit, towards the adoption of such an outlook has been seen in Renan, in Bourget and in Brunetière; and elements of it have been seen also in the thought of Barrès. On a strictly logical plane, of course, such a position solves nothing. Man must act, according to Lahor, as if the world were 'real' and certain values 'justified'. But accepting which conceptions as 'real' and which values as 'justified'? In practice, such an attitude most favours the man who is socially and ethically conservative - who wishes simply to preserve existing ideals and values. Into such a perspective, Lahor fits perfectly.

Laforgue's attempt at a solution is quite different. He and Barrès both endeavour to overcome the nihilism of their youth through an adaptation of Hartmann's 'Unconscious' - that is, by the construction of an image of the world in which they see themselves as firmly 'integrated', and in which they find a source of direction. In both men, too, there is the same would-be renunciation of thought and responsibility. Paradoxically, Laforgue attempts to come to an acceptance of his own 'nothingness' and of the 'absurdity' of existence through an acceptance of the very idea of

universal determinism against which he had earlier revolted, through the cultivation of an attitude of fatalistic abandonment to the brutal forces of determinism which govern life. But such an attitude does not constitute an overcoming of nihilism, merely an acceptance of it - and Laforgue in fact continues to struggle, unable thus to renounce 'thought' and to overcome his awareness of the 'absurd'. Laforgue saw clearly enough the problem facing him and his whole era - that of living in a world deprived of all absolutes and all 'justifications'. But he failed to provide any satisfactory solution, at least on a philosophical plane; his work ends on a purely personal solution of compromise, following close on the heels of a call for destruction of the whole existing social order, a destruction which arises from the very idea of the 'uselessness' and 'irrationality' of existence.

It was through the ideology of his 'Culte du Moi', conceived of as a means of establishing new values, that Barrès first attempted to overcome his youthful nihilism. But the 'Culte du Moi' ultimately ends in failure; the end is as nihilistic as the beginning. In Barrès' ideal of the 'homme libre', with its claim to a total moral autonomy and total detachment from all things, can be seen in fact the possible nihilistic consequences of one of the features of the 'anti-positivist reaction' and 'idealist revival' of the time, namely its emphasis on the creative freedom of the individual self - a fact even more clearly demonstrated by Jarry and the extremes to which he carried such a demand. Barrès' later thought involves a rejection of the ideal of

the 'homme libre' (as also of its intellectualist tendencies), in the willing acceptance of the forces of determinism.

Barrès also differs from other writers studied here in that he is the only one to turn to political action in search of a solution. In part, this is a largely negative solution: his politics is initially above all one of hatred and destruction. Politics is also conceived of in part as a distraction - designed to take Barrès out of his sterile self-absorption. Whilst a further spur to political activity arises from Barrès' projection of his own philosophical and moral dilemma onto an image of the nation as a whole. Most important of all, however, politics offered the possibility of the creation or invention of new myths, myths which would render possible an escape from the impasse of nihilism by providing a new source of direction and unity, a new 'meaning'. Barrès' thought is doubtless influenced here by the growing trend towards the adoption of 'As if' philosophies, and most of all by the thought of Renan. But his approach differs also from that of Renan. The latter is concerned with the preservation of existing 'myths', 'fictions', and the like; Barrès is concerned above all with the need to create new myths which will provide new goals and values in place of those that have been destroyed. This is the essence of his path from nihilism to nationalism; yet even so, his quest was not wholly successful. Barrès' conception of the need for new 'myths' represents in part simply an extension of the solipsistic and relativistic tendencies of the ideology of

the 'Culte du Moi', embodied in the view that it is the moi, the individual self, which shapes the world, which gives it 'meaning' and significance. Whilst even in the midst of the nationalist doctrine of his maturity, Barrès remained painfully aware of the shakiness - indeed, of the 'imaginary' nature - of his own postulates, and haunted from time to time by the continuing nihilistic consciousness of his youth with its conviction of the 'absurdity' of all goals and of all activity.

As for Jarry, he differs from all those writers discussed here in that, where others attempt to flee or to overcome nihilism by various means, he resolutely embraces this same nihilism. His 'science' of pataphysics, in part an extreme development of the ideas of the contemporary critique of science, represents (where it is not simply a huge philosophical joke) a systematisation of the view that every action and every belief is equally arbitrary, equally 'absurd' - and that every 'solution' is equally 'imaginary'. He pushes the affirmation of Bergson and others of individual freedom to the point of a nihilistic individualism - a total affirmation of the 'self' and its freedom which requires a total negation of the claims of 'the world'. Such a freedom is of course a 'freedom of absurdity'; but where others attempt to flee this freedom, Jarry accepts and cultivates it - unless it be the case that his gradual suicide by drink also constitutes a form of escape, from that freedom and from all else. Whatever the answer, Jarry's rejection not only of the values, but even of the conceptions of 'reality' held by his contemporaries, leads

him to a deliberate cultivation, aided by drink, of the 'unreality' of dream and hallucination. Ultimately, Jarry's onslaught on 'reality' extends even to a destruction of himself. Yet if there seems to be a touch of madness in such an enterprise, the fact remains that Jarry found the sources and materials for such extreme developments in the thought of his contemporaries: his example reveals the nihilistic possibilities inherent in certain features of the thought of his age. As his friend Marcel Schwob said of Jarry: "Il est un signe des temps."(5)

But perhaps most interesting of all the developments in the intellectual life of this age, and one of the most widespread consequences of the nihilism we have studied, is the growth of an attitude of anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism. The evolution of Barrès is perhaps most typical of all in this regard: following his master Renan, he comes to see 'reason' as an inevitable source of nihilism; 'reason', and the advance of scientific knowledge, are seen as inevitably destructive of all absolutes, of all metaphysical, religious and ethical ideals and values. A similar view is echoed by Laforgue who, in his poetry, actually equates thought and consciousness with 'evil'. In both Laforgue and Lahor is to be found the idea that modern man is suffering from a surfeit of 'thought', of 'reason', of 'analysis', of 'intellect'. Whilst we have seen similar conceptions in Bourget, Brunetière, Gourmont, Claudel, and others alike. Bourget's Le Disciple itself represents a significant stage in the crisis of rationalism of these years: its implicit 'moral', made wholly explicit by Brunet-

ière, amounts to a rejection of the centuries-old belief in the ultimate rightness, goodness and usefulness of 'reason' and 'truth' - a rejection which springs from the same source as the (rhetorical) lament of the aging Renan: "Qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste?". On almost all sides, the cry goes up that the world is suffering from an excess of thought and of reason - a view expressed by the philosopher J.-M. Guyau in the terms: "Nous souffrons d'une sorte d'hypertrophie de l'intelligence"(6) -, leading to a sustained attack on both. Alongside those proclamations already noted of "la faillite de la science" and "la banqueroute de la nature" is to be heard also, in these years, that of the 'bankruptcy' of 'reason'.

The consequences of this development are various. Some - Lahor and Guyau amongst them -, increasingly contrasting 'thought' and 'knowledge' with 'life' and 'action', go on to advocate a new philosophy of 'vitalism'. Laforgue and Barrès both attempt - not entirely successfully - to find a refuge from thought and from a consequent moral solitude in an imagined 'reintegration' in some new non-rational unity - both men also tending towards the denial of the existence of an independent, individual 'self'. Jarry's reaction is characteristically negative, as, through his topsy-turvy 'science' of pataphysics, he stands 'reason' completely on its head. Brunetière, in a speech on 'L'Idée de Patrie'(7), no less characteristically sees the supreme victory of reason in a submission to something beyond (a development which, in the light of history, can be seen to be somewhat ominous); in others, such as Claudel, a condem-

nation of critical reason leads to a submission to the authority of the Church; whilst some years later, others will renounce independent thought and responsibility in a submission to the State and its 'Leader' - a situation perhaps anticipated in Barrès' cry for a "maître... axiome, religion ou prince des hommes". Others - amongst them the Bourget of Le Disciple (implicitly, at least) and the novel's chief defender, Brunetière - advocate a purely 'pragmatic' view of life: 'truth' is no longer 'absolute' or 'scientific', the result of unfettered investigation, but merely that which is 'useful' to 'society'. Whilst in others again - and here, too, Barrès is perhaps most typical - the apparent failure of 'reason' opens the door to a flood of 'irrational' (or at least 'non-rational') explanations of existence, and to a growing tendency to turn to sources other than 'reason' and its offspring, 'universal', 'scientific' truth, in search of a foundation for values. The point here is not merely the fact of falling back upon non-rational values and truths: men have always in practice based themselves upon irrational prejudice, emotion and the like. What is significant in this development is the deliberate abandonment of even the pretence of a rational justification for those values and truths upheld.

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So much for the nihilism of the last decades of the nineteenth century. What is the picture in the years that follow? The immediate perspective sees a lessening of certain of the contributing factors to this nihilism. The

solipsism of the symbolist movement, as such at least, died for the most part a natural death(*). More importantly, the 'anti-positivist reaction' and 'idealist revival' of the years between 1890 and 1914, in which Victor Giraud saw, "au point de vue philosophique, l'apport propre et le trait dominant de toute une génération intellectuelle"(8), vigorously attacked the materialist and determinist conceptions of nineteenth-century science, reaffirming the freedom of the human mind and the reality of spiritual values. With this 'idealist revival' went also a resurgence of political, social and moral conservatism in intellectual circles, as also - in these same milieux, at least - a Catholic revival, evidence of which, in literature, can be seen in the work of Bloy, Huysmans, Claudel and Péguy. Whilst the would-be political and social 'opting-out' of the 'decadent' and 'symbolist' generations tended to be replaced, increasingly around the turn of the century and above all in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, by a new political and social awareness. The late 1890's saw a trend back to what at the time was called "l'art social"; whilst at the same time the more idealistic of the intellectual

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(*) This is certainly true of the more radical manifestations, some of which have been studied here, of this solipsistic tendency. But at the same time is not this solipsism merely an extreme, and perhaps naïve, form of the now widely accepted view of the element of 'subjectivity' in all concepts of both 'truth' and 'reality'? The 'decomposition' of reality in certain art movements of the twentieth century is surely following in the same path. Whilst the theoretical physicists of this century seem to have done a great deal to convince us that our common-sense view of 'reality' is no more than a 'convenient', 'practical', at best 'probable', representation of true reality.

'anarchists' of the early 1890's tended to turn to an espousal of socialist doctrines and aims, through which an increasing number of intellectuals sought a new source of direction and sense of purpose.

But if socialism offered one way out of the ideological void of the years preceding, it was not the only one. The resurgence of the Left in France is paralleled by that of a new, nationalist Right. Both the 'mystic nationalism' of Barrès and the 'integral nationalism' of Maurras were conceived of originally by their authors as providing a bulwark against the nihilism of their youth and the intellectual 'anarchy' which they saw all around them; both offered a new sense of direction and purpose through the espousal of new myths, in particular that of the 'Nation' or Patrie. Whatever Barrès' own inner doubts, the influence of these two men upon the intellectual youth of the generation which grew up between 1900 and 1914 was enormous. Portraits of the time of this 'jeunesse intellectuelle' tend to stress - in contrast to the 'pessimism', doubts and hesitations of the preceding generation - its 'optimism', self-confidence, and sense of purpose. They stress also its patriotic fervour, its tendency towards an acceptance of national traditions as also - often for purely pragmatic reasons - of the faith and moral values of Catholicism, as well as a tendency towards a conscious anti-intellectualism, a deliberate limitation of intellectual inquiry, and a subordination of 'abstract' philosophical meditation to immediate, 'practical' ends.

As a result of such developments as these, many believed the fundamental causes of the nihilism of the years

between 1880 and 1900 to have vanished. Such was not to be the case. Looking beyond the years 1900-1914, we can see that many of the essential features of the pattern traced in this thesis have remained the same. The ebbing away of Christian belief, as of belief in all other 'absolutes', has continued apace in the twentieth century, while the world-view revealed by the science of a hundred years ago has remained, in those respects that matter here, fundamentally the same. On a more immediate, political and social plane, the First World War shattered the optimism of pre-1914 society and revealed the hollowness of many of the values upon which it was built; even before the slaughter was over, the birth of Dada in 1916 heralded a resurgence of the spirit of destruction and systematic negation already manifested in Jarry's Ubu. For all its attempts to go beyond Dada, the Surrealist movement was born of and marked by the same spirit of total revolt and negation; Breton's definition of the 'surrealist act' - "l'acte surréaliste le plus simple consiste, revolver aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on peut, dans la foule"(9) - is surely just as nihilistic as Ubu's savage "A la trappe!". In the literature of the years between 1918 and 1945 - in the work of the surrealists, of Malraux, of Camus, of Sartre, of Kafka, and others - the theme of the 'absurdity' of existence and the non-justification of all values is almost a commonplace. Sartre and Camus have both analysed and portrayed the nihilism of their (and our) era, before going on to attempt to find a way out of the impasse. According to Sartre, the "point de départ" of

existentialism is to be found in Dostoevsky's "Si Dieu n'existait pas, tout serait permis"(10). Whilst his novel La Nausée goes to the heart of the nihilistic predicament as it describes the discovery of the 'contingency', the "gratuité parfaite", of all existence and all activity, as also of a freedom that is 'useless' and 'absurd'. Nor are these isolated endeavours: in the wake of Nietzsche, a host of philosophical discussions and analyses of contemporary nihilism have sprung into being, above all, but certainly not exclusively, in Germany. The summing-up by Jaspers of the philosophical situation of our time, as he sees it, can be taken as typical: "Everything we believe in has become hollow; everything is conditioned and relative, there is no ground, no absolute, no being in itself. Everything is questionable, nothing is true, everything is allowed."(11) Finally, on a political and social plane, many have seen in certain events of the twentieth century - and in particular in the events that overcame Germany between 1933 and 1945 - in part at least the manifestation of a spirit of destructive nihilism.

Thus the nihilism of the last decades of the nineteenth century, whose sources, expression and consequences have been studied in this thesis, and whose significance the latter has endeavoured to stress, has come to be widely seen as a major philosophical problem of our time. The emotional reaction to this nihilism of a number of those writers studied here is no doubt due in part to the shock of new ideas, and is to be seen as the expression of an immediate sense of loss. It may be seen as deriving also

from a too-exclusive preoccupation with purely abstract, metaphysical problems. Yet even without the melodrama of a Nietzsche - or the youthful anguish of a Laforgue or a Barrès -, the situation of nihilism with which they, and numerous others, saw themselves confronted remains, in essence, our own. It is only our reaction to this situation which has changed (becoming for the most part one of relative indifference); but that is another story.

Chapter XII: REFERENCES.

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I. JEAN LAHOR (HENRI CAZALIS).

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